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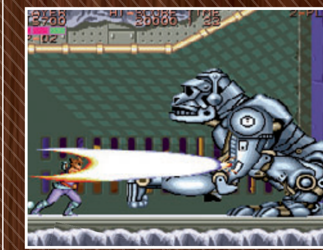
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THE MAKING OF... Strider

WE TALK TO CREATOR ISUKE YOTSUI ABOUT CAPCOM'S FLAMBOYANT COIN-OP HIT





Game Room

Behind the scenes of Microsoft's digital arcade

IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER

APPLE II
HOW STEVE WOZNIAK'S COMPUTER HELPED FORM THE ALMIGHTY APPLE

GOLDEN AXE
THE FULL STORY BEHIND SEGA'S EXCELLENT FANTASY BEAT-'EM-UP

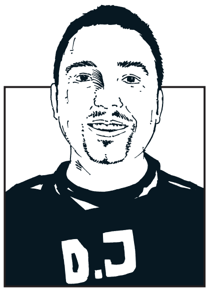
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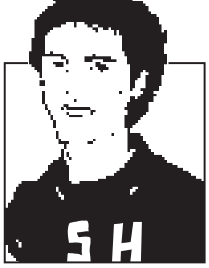
THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE ARCADE GAME?



DARRAN JONES

Well it's obviously *Strider*. I totally fell in love with it when I first played it and it still makes me all warm inside today.
Expertise:
Juggling **Retro Gamer** and a family
Currently playing:
Monster Hunter Tri
Favourite game of all time:
Strider



STUART HUNT

Donkey Kong. It's the most perfectly designed game ever and has everything you could want from a classic arcade title.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Golden Axe
Favourite game of all time:
Golden Axe



JASON KELK

The one I played a huge amount of as a teenager and still occasionally return to is *Gradius*. Despite a few flaws it's still a great game.
Expertise:
Scrolling on computers that don't want to.
Currently playing:
Mission Genocide (Amstrad CPC)
Favourite game of all time:
Io



CRAIG GRANNELL

Frenzy! No, wait! *Robotron: 2084*! No, wait! *Tempest*! No, wait! *OutRun 2*! No, wait! *Defender*! No wait! *Wizard Of Wor*! No, wait! *Missile Command*! Arggghh!
Expertise:
Games you don't need 37 fingers to control
Currently playing:
Fox vs Duck
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



ASHLEY DAY

Up until a month ago I would have said *Mr Driller*. But Game Room has changed my life by introducing me to Konami's amazing *Road Fighter*. It might just be the best racing game ever made.
Expertise: The games of Team17, MSX, Sega's *Shining Force* series
Currently playing:
Cave Story
Favourite game of all time:
Shining Force III



PAUL DRURY

The big and bouncy *Jump Bug*. An unconverted gem from Rock-Ola with a rhythm all its own. Try it.
Expertise:
Vector rabbits
Currently playing:
Heavy Rain
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



IAIN LEE

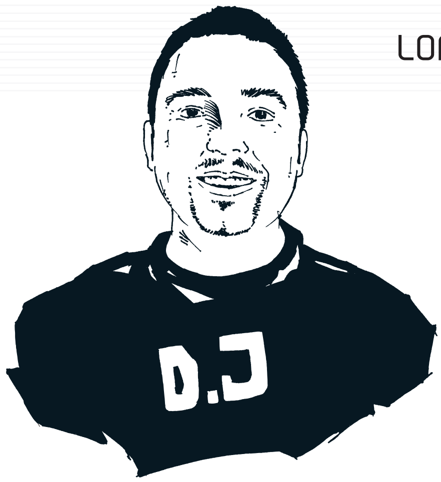
That's an easy one. It's *Mario Kart Arcade GP*.
Expertise: Sinclair stuff
Currently playing:
Left 4 Dead 2
Favourite game of all time:
Elite (BBC B)



PAUL DAVIES

The wonderful shooter *Moon Cresta*, for the memories that go with it.
Expertise: Banging my head against a brick wall
Currently playing:
BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger
Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts

LOADING...



The release of Game Room, to me, is a momentous occasion. One of the reasons why I enjoy playing retro games is because they remind me of another time of my life. A time that was free of commitments, a time where I was ten stone lighter, a time where your only money concerns were buying a C-90 so you could fill it with all of your mate's Amstrad games. Most of all, however, it was a time where I could hang out with my friends – our local haunt was Quay Amusements on Poole Quay – and simply play amazing games.

Game Room, for me at least, retains that spirit of youthful exuberance. Yes, the emulation isn't 100 per cent perfect and server issues can occasionally crop up, but chatting with **Retro Gamer** readers as we discuss our high scores and favourite games is tremendously satisfying. Nostalgia is a powerful weapon, especially when wielded correctly, and this constant integration of new and old classics across all the current systems is something that I'm tremendously excited about.

Hopefully the rest of you feel the same way.

Enjoy the magazine,





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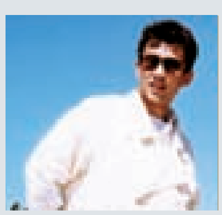


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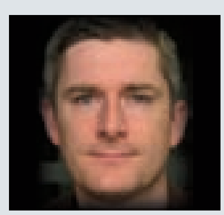
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He's been behind some of gaming's most inventive rhythm-action games. Find out about his opinion on the industry and the birth of *Vib-Ribbon*



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He loves mountain climbing, nearly froze to death when climbing between buildings, and gains inspiration from children's books. Discover how the man known as Isuka created Capcom's *Strider*



56 JON BURTON
We speak to the co-founder of Traveller's Tales about setting up the licence-based studio, weathering 20 years in the videogame industry, and what he's up to next

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"Still seen as the pinnacle of the tile-based RPG"

Craig Ritchie



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Recently ported to Nintendo's DS, Craig Ritchie explains why Square's Crono Trigger is still a fantastic RPG



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Your in-depth guide to Sega's fantasy arcade slash-'em-up





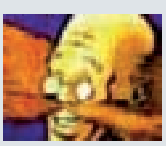
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Darran finally unleashes the making of that he's been threatening to

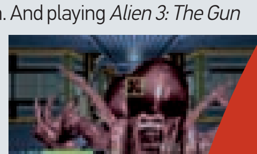
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24 ALIEN 3: THE GUN

Reader Robert Frazer regales us with his tales of a youth spent gunning down vile creatures in a service station. And playing *Alien 3: The Gun*

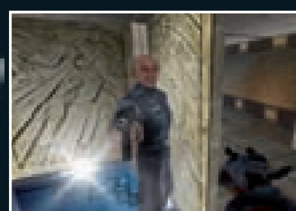




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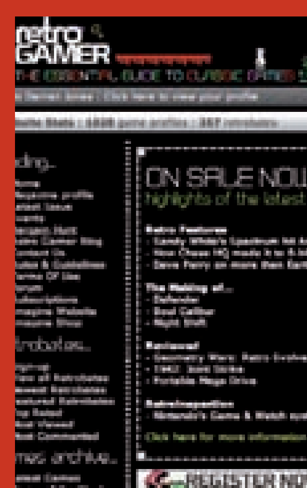
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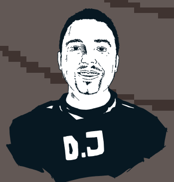
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>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



>> It's been a quiet month in the world of retro, which means all the exciting announcements of old games with new skins will be coming at E3. Fortunately, we've still found plenty to enjoy, including news of the 28-year Asteroids record getting smashed...

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If you're a big fan of the VIC-20 you may want to turn over the page...

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It's true: we've seen the first build of *Sonic The Hedgehog 4: Episode I* and it looks awesome

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The former editor of *C&VG* wonders why they don't make videogames like they used to

13 LEARN THE CRANE TECHNIQUE
Find out why David Crane decided to show everyone how he made Atari 2600 games

16 A MOMENT WITH MASAYA MATSUURA
The music master behind *PaRappa The Rapper* stops by for a little chat



GO DEEPER

>> *Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light* will be the thirteenth official release to feature the famous female archaeologist and the first non-handheld offering with an isometric Lara, after *Tomb Raider: The Prophecy* on the Game Boy Advance.

>> The original *StarCraft* remains one of the most-played online games in the world, particularly in Korea, where it sold over 4.5 million copies.

RETRO ROUNDUP: DO THE MONKEY!

EXCITING RETRO UPDATES THAT ARE HEADING YOUR WAY

As the first quarter of 2010 draws to a close, we thought it would be a grand idea to take a peek at some of the upcoming retro-themed releases that have got us salivating here at RG.

First up is the eagerly anticipated *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge Special Edition*, as revealed by this very magazine back in issue 70. The follow-up to last year's successful high-def treatment of the first *Monkey Island* will feature similar updated artwork alongside the emulated original, with voiceovers by the returning cast of the first game. Bonuses will include unseen development artwork and in-game commentaries, which we're hoping will include creators Ron Gilbert and Tim Schafer, seen recently at the game's announcement in San Francisco. In response to gamers who have obviously not been brought up the old-school way, the title will feature optional direct control of Guybrush, and an improved interface for the iPhone version. Fan criticism of Guybrush's hair also seems to have been addressed – not that we were too bothered about that in the first place, mind. If you've not played the game through in any of its previous iterations we'll just mention that the ending, which we couldn't possibly give away here, is one of the funniest and most unexpected in the whole of gaming, and it needs to be experienced at least once. *Monkey Island 2 Special Edition* is set for a summer 2010 release.

Another upcoming big release that seems to be holding fans in equal measures of fear and trepidation is Konami's reboot of the *Castlevania* franchise, *Lords Of Shadow*. The gothic action-adventure, currently under development by Madrid-based MercurySteam in conjunction with Kojima Productions, wasn't announced as an official *Castlevania* release until last year, but Konami's producer Dave Cox has commented that the release will "take *Castlevania* into brave, uncharted territories". It will feature a new member of the Belmont clan as its hero, with voicework from well-known thesps including Sir Patrick Stewart, Robert



» [Arcade] *The King Of Fighters XIII* will feature the upgraded character sprites and game engine that debuted in the last game in the series.

"King Of Fighters XIII aims to alleviate many of the criticisms levelled at its predecessor"

Carlyle and Jason Isaacs. Recent console titles such as the excellent *Bayonetta* have really raised the bar for the hack-and-slash genre, so here's hoping that this will live up to its potential, despite the critical failure of previous 3D instalments.

While the last *Tomb Raider* outing, *Underworld*, didn't exactly set the world alight in terms of sales or popularity – possibly due to a young upstart by the name of Nathan Drake – it was a solid title featuring Lara's most advanced move set to date and a return to the more open environments of *Anniversary*. Crystal Dynamics/Square Enix's upcoming *Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light* will be the latest spin-off for the pony-tailed relic hunter, and will reuse *Underworld*'s impressive graphics engine, this time with a *Diablo*-style isometric perspective. The emphasis will be on puzzle elements and two-player co-operative play, with the second player taking the role of an Aztec warrior by the name of Totec, although a single-player mode will also be included. The game will be available for download for Xbox Live and PlayStation Network and on the PC, in a move similar to Eidos's digital release of *Anniversary*.

Fans of Sid Meier's classic *Civilization* series can look forward to the release of a new entry in the saga when *Civilization V* hits the shops later this year. Expect a complete revamp of combat, with the removal of multiple 'stacked' units creating a more streamlined experience much closer to the original game, and a new hexagonal map format. Fireaxis's update also appears to have had a graphical overhaul, reducing the on-screen clutter of the previous game with visuals that evoke a classic *Risk*-like board game appearance.

Taking a quick diversion to the arcade, SNK Playmore's new entry in its much-lauded 2D fighting franchise, *The King Of Fighters XIII*, was recently previewed in Akihabara, Japan. The game will conclude Ash Crimson's story arc, which began in *The King Of Fighters 2003*, and appears designed to alleviate many of the fan criticisms levelled at its predecessor. It will also see the return of fan favourites Mai, Yuri and King, who first appeared together in the Women Fighters Team in *The King Of Fighters '94*.

Ten years after the release of the massively popular original game in its real-time strategy series, Blizzard's hotly anticipated *StarCraft 2* is now in the final stages of development, with an announced release date of June 2010. The new instalment reunites old foes in the form of the Protoss, Terran and Zerg factions, and will pick up the space saga's story directly where *StarCraft: Brood War* left off.

So there you have it. Plenty of classic franchises are being given a new airing, and with this year's E3 just around the corner, we expect this impressive list to become even more swollen as the year goes on. *

RG's Most Wanted

>> The retro franchises that we're most looking forward to



Monkey Island 2: Special Edition (PS3/360/PC/Mac/iPhone)

The most highly rated outing of the series, and Ron Gilbert's finest hour, this release should please both fans and newcomers to the franchise. At around three times the size of the first game, *Monkey Island 2* sees the return of Guybrush, Governor Marley and, of course, evil undead pirate LeChuck, in a rip-roaring quest to find the legendary 'Big Whoop'.



Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow (PS3/360)

Konami's forthcoming big-budget attempt to reboot the Belmont saga is something of a gamble, but this 3D extravaganza certainly looks promising. Could be *God Of War* meets *Shadow Of The Colossus*, with elements of *Super Castlevania IV*. Input from *Metal Gear Solid* director Hideo Kojima means it might be one to look out for.

Civilization V (PC)

As the first proper *Civ* in five years, this entry sees a complete overhaul of the combat system and the introduction of a hexagonal map system, with upgraded environmental animation and new elements such as independent city states. An included fully fledged 'world builder' should make this already cerebral series deeper than the Grand Canyon.



THE RETRO DEBATE

>> Which returning retro series do you want to play the most?

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY

nakamura
Castlevania for me. Be nice to see if this will turn out decent.

TwoHeadedBoy
I am fully unaware of all of these, but can never say no to more *Castlevania*.

SirClive
I am not a *Tomb Raider* fan, but Lara is probably the only one out of that list that I will play.

Greyfox
Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow will rock it for me. It's a cross between *God Of War* and *Devil May Cry* with hopefully all the coolness of *Super Castlevania IV* on the SNES, and will have some nice puzzles thrown in for good measure.

HalcyonDaze00
Monkey Island 2. Quite simply one of the greatest games of all time.

Rinoa
Tomb Raider And The Guardian Of Light, as it's unlikely I'll play the others.

Dunjohn
None of them really interests me, but since playing *Symphony Of The Night* on XBLA recently, I'm a *Castlevania* convert. So I said that one. But really, *Super Street Fighter IV*'s what I'm watching.

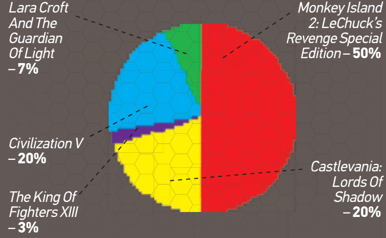
Gabe
Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow, but that's almost because it's nothing like any of its predecessors, really. Though if this is about some themed coverage in the mag – not just the latest version – then *Civilization V*.

IronMaidenRule
Mmm, *Monkey Island 2*!

thevulture
Civilization V for myself. It's gone from strength to strength, so I'm curious to see how the latest one shapes up. As for *Tomb Raider And The Guardian Of Light*? Any new instalment will have to go some to tempt me from the *Uncharted* series.

FORUM OPINION

Which of the following titles interests you the most?



retrocolumns

>> RETRO RECOLLECTIONS WITH CELEB IAIN LEE

Here's the bio...
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *Two Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.



Hi there. My name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro

Is VIC there? And if so, who cares?

I'd hate for you all to think I'm a negative sort of chap. I know issue 74's column was a bit of a downer, and I'm afraid this month's is going to be as well. Sorry about that. I will take some happy pills in the next few weeks and write a loving and positive piece for the next issue. Promise.

I've been thinking that there have been some wonderful machines and old computer consoles throughout the years, and I have a soft spot for nearly all of them. Even the slightly crapper ones. Hell, I could probably pass a happy hour or so on a Binatone. That's how much I love 'em.

But there is one machine that is such a massive pile of elephant plop that it should be wiped from the memory of retro gamers worldwide, and I would be surprised if anyone disagrees with me.

The VIC-20.

Seriously, what is the point of that awful machine? Even as a kid I just didn't get it. A poor man's C64 in every respect. It looked even more like a brick than its superior younger brother and seemed to do very little. My friend Michael Hall, who I have mentioned before in this mag simply because we shared so many gaming adventures together as kids, had a VIC-20 as well as a Spectrum. I always groaned when he decided to get the brick out instead of the rubber-keyed games machine that was obviously better. To this day I still don't know why he thought we would have more fun playing *Hunchback* on this abomination of technology than *Samantha Fox Strip Poker* on the ZX.

I've just Googled 'VIC-20' to see if I can come up with anything good about it to try to make this article a little lighter. The only thing I can find is that it was originally going to be called 'Vixen', but this had to be changed because it sounded too similar to 'wichsen' – the German word for masturbate. Odd, then, that they settled for 'VIC', as it sounds like 'fick', which is German for… well, you go and look it up. But it is very naughty. By the way, I got these 'facts' from Wikipedia – the lazy man's research tool. I should know never to trust anything written on this site as, for ages, it falsely claimed that not only was I a member of a Kiss tribute band – I'm not – but also that I was a gay cowboy.

Does anybody still dig out their VIC-20 and play around with it? I notice on eBay that an optimistic soul has put one on there at the starting price of £20, and there are loads of games going for as much as £6.50. Is this some naive dreamer living in a make-believe world where utter crap sells for decent money? Or am I completely out of touch? Then again, who am I to say anything is crap these days, for not only was I in *The All Star Impression Show*, but I also thought that *The Persuasionists* was quite funny.

For ages, Wikipedia claimed I was a gay cowboy and in a Kiss tribute band

What's your favourite videogame franchise? I love my shooting games, so I'm going for Tom Clancy's *Rainbow Six* series.



» [Live Arcade] The checkerboard walls are back in full force in *Sonic the Hedgehog 4*.

SONIC'S BACK ON FORM

WE GET OUR FIRST TASTE OF SONIC 4

A few weeks ago, the wonderful Stefan McGarry was kind enough to show off one of the very first builds of *Sonic 4*. We were only allowed to see the first few stages of Splash Hill Zone, but early indications show that Sega has listened to all that feedback and actually delivered a proper Sonic game.

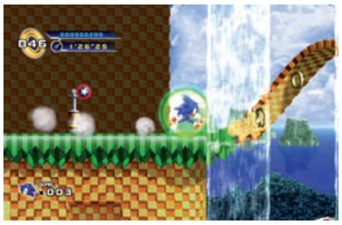
From the moment the title screen springs up and Sonic starts wagging his hand at you, it instantly feels like the days of old. It's helped further by some truly excellent tunes that easily boast the catchiness of the originals. Visually, it's also extremely polished.

Yes, the new pre-rendered style doesn't quite match the 16-bit bitmap sprites that looked so amazing back in 1991, but the style itself is unmistakably *Sonic*, and while we're not too convinced by the way he runs – we're picky sods, you see – it's certainly nice to see Sega doing everything it can to appease its fans.

The first thing you notice is that *Sonic The Hedgehog 4* is blisteringly fast. There are secret routes to discover, bottomless pits are nowhere to be seen and the balance between exploration and all-out speed appears just as it did in the original games. Being a new *Sonic* game, Sega couldn't help but add a new mechanic, and while the addition of Sonic's homing attack seems a little out of place, it certainly has potential. Continually home in on foes and you can significantly boost your score multiplier, thereby giving *Sonic 4* plenty of replay value.

It's still a little while before the hedgehog's new adventure is released, but this is already looking far better than we could possibly imagine. Here's hoping the end product is just as good.

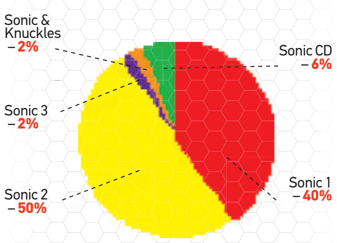




FORUM OPINION

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY

What is your favourite Sonic game?



"*Sonic 1* for me, mainly because it felt like such a landmark release and offered something totally different to *Mario* - at the time, the speed was breathtaking" – **slacey1070**

"*Sonic The Hedgehog 2*! It's the only game in the series to get a perfect balance of platforming and speed. The first *Sonic* feels too slow, and later ones rely too heavily on instant-kill death traps" – **Rayne**

"*Sonic 2*. The hype surrounding it was crazy, and it lived up to that hype!" – **TheNewMonkey**

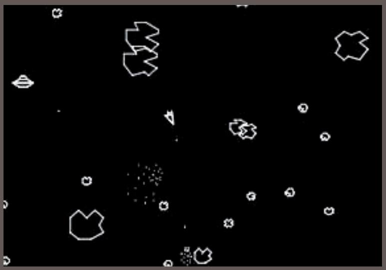
MICRO BYTES

Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



» Latest YouTube News

www.youtube.com/user/retrogamerdaz
Same Name, Different Game is proving very popular, and there have been plenty of requests for Atari Lynx games, which Darran is currently in the process of putting up. He has also decided to waste more money and has started to collect Nintendo DS games. Catch the latest videos as well as a parody of *There Will Be Blood* (provided he gets it up in time) by heading to the usual address.



» Asteroids score smashed

After an astonishing 28 years, Scott Safran's *Asteroids* score has finally been beaten. 41-year-old Seattle locksmith John McAllister scored 41,338,740, beating Safran's record by 2,300 points. Forgoing sleep for three days and taking toilet breaks by storing up lives, the amazing achievement was shown online and will soon be verified by Twin Galaxies. Congratulations, John. We salute you.



» Retro Gamer app

Just a little reminder that a digital version of everyone's favourite retro gaming magazine can now be found on iTunes. Initially available for just £1.19, subsequent issues can picked up for the bargain price of just £2.99. Back issues are also available and it's possible to get a six or 12-month subscription as well. If you have difficulty finding **Retro Gamer** and have access to an iPhone, then this is the perfect treat.

retro columns

>> PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio…
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years



When cool games ruled the Earth

Hi, it's your resident caveman here with another tale of what gaming was like in the time of the dinosaurs.

I'm feeling old. But I like it. I sometimes wish that I was around in the Fifties to know how it was to discover early rock 'n' roll, importing the hottest new 7" singles from America and meeting a new group of like-minded friends. I'm not that old, okay?

However, I can savour vivid memories of searching for early computer and console games, loving that this was all undiscovered territory. Shopping for videogames in 2010 is like a Sunday afternoon trip to Tesco Express… or even exactly like a Sunday afternoon trip to the Tesco Express! Sometimes I feel like Marty McFly browsing the shelves: lager, microwave curry, *Pokémon HeartGold*. Amazing!

One of the things I liked most about getting the best games through the Eighties and early Nineties was learning who you could trust. This began as a crowd of people standing before you and the next 'go' on a new coin-op. Later it became magazines such as *Zzap!64*, then *C&VG* and *Mean Machines*, who I quickly identified as being the same as the arcade crowd, but with access to stuff coming out of Japan and the US for consoles. Guys in the arcade literally stood by games worth playing, and the best magazines did this symbolically too. I miss these magazines that talked about the games they really liked, poked merciless fun at the ones they clearly disliked, and didn't attempt to educate me on the finer points of the industry.

I don't really see this old crowd existing any more. We're kept at arm's length at the end of a conveyor belt carrying Next Big Things, because this is what's needed for modern magazines to survive. They probably feel as ill about it as I do. Perhaps I just haven't evolved, but kindred spirits are increasingly hard to find these days.

Retro Gamer, I have just realised, is not just a magazine about retro games. It's also retro in its approach to talking about the games. Like I know that Darran is obsessed with *Monster Hunter*, which means he knows what ought to be the next big thing even if it never turns out to be that way. Playing *Monster Hunter Freedom Unite* for 200 hours is the kind of stupidity that you can rely on.

So here I am, a thing of the past in many ways, probably wanting something that I'll never find again on the news stand, **RG** excluded: a magazine that loves games and talks about them like gamers do, not like they're hoping for a career in politics or law or psychology. Knowing how to recognise good and bad games isn't rocket surgery, as an old friend of mine used to joke.

Think yourself lucky that **Retro Gamer** still exists on its own terms.

Playing Monster Hunter for 200 hours is the kind of stupidity that you can rely on

What game would you like to see on Game Room? Konami's excellent shmup *Xexex*! It'll never happen, though.



LEARN THE CRANE TECHNIQUE

DAVID CRANE TALKS ABOUT HIS LATEST IPHONE PROJECT, THE TECHNICAL WIZARDRY SERIES

If you've ever wondered how those sprites were made to animate on crude 2600 technology, or wanted to understand the workings of Atari's first console, you may want to download the *2600 Magic* and *Dragster Magic* iPhone apps – the first two volumes of David Crane's *Technical Wizardry* series, in which the legendary programmer explains how he managed to get the best from Atari's hardware through basic tutorials, peppered with interactive diagrams that even a chimp could understand.

The idea came about when David became the first recipient of the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences Pioneer Award in February. After receiving the prestigious honour, he was keen to rekindle his fond memories of overcoming the technical challenges he faced when he started out as a game programmer.

"It occurred to me that game programmers today might appreciate learning what we had to go through just to put a character on the screen," he explains. "Plus there were game-specific tricks that only I knew, which would be lost unless I documented them. So over Christmas I collected old notes to see how they might be collated into an interesting piece."

Originally, David considered approaching magazines to publish his thoughts but quickly realised the benefits of switching it to the iPhone and releasing the books through his company, AppStar Games, instead.

"I realised, 'Wait a minute. I am already a publisher, and if I put it on the iPhone I could animate my figures to make them easier to understand,'" he explains. "I could also serialise the volumes, expanding them over time. *Dragster Magic* was intended as the first, but I realised that the techniques would be next to impossible to comprehend without an understanding of the 2600, so I created *2600 Magic* as a primer. Much of the information can be found with a few hours of research, but I distilled it into one place."

The apps are $1.99 each, with a free sample available, and David says that their popularity will determine whether or not he continues with the series, which will go on to explore *Pitfall* and *Grand Prix*.

"Only if the first two have a reasonably large reach will I expand the current line," he says. "I hope that there is a lot of interest, because if you thought the techniques behind *Dragster* were complicated, wait until you learn about *Grand Prix*!" *



* WHAT WE THINK

Darran



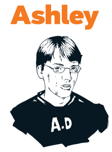
This is absolutely fascinating. So far I've downloaded all of the available apps that Crane has created and I'm absolutely astonished by what he was able to achieve on Atari's machine. An invaluable insight into making classic games.

Stuart



This is a great idea. It's wonderful that David is sharing his knowledge with fans. If you're a 2600 enthusiast you owe it to yourself to download these and get personally schooled by one of the grandmasters of 8-bit games programming.

Ashley



Any chance to see into the mind of a master like Crane is always welcome, but I question the medium. Not everyone has an expensive device like an iPhone, so why didn't he just make these demonstrations available to view through the web?



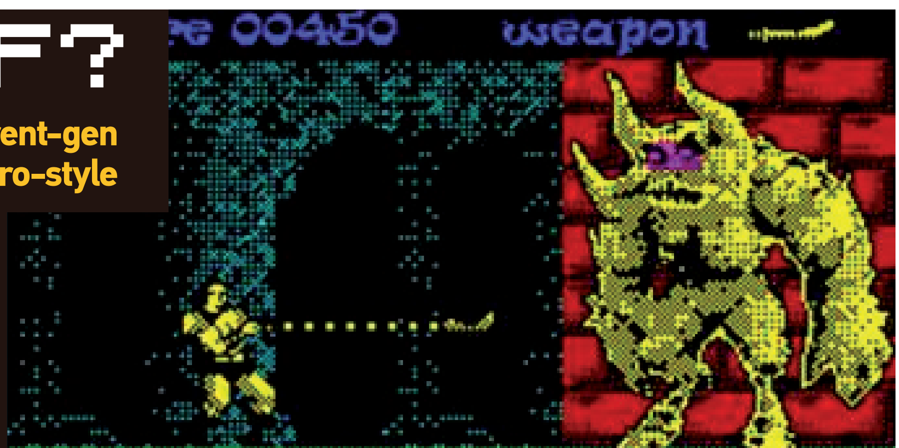
WHAT IF?

Your favourite current-gen games remade, retro-style

Subject No 10

God Of War III

WHEN TREVOR ASKED us which new title we'd like put through his magic retro game generator, the team was all in agreement: *God Of War III*. The first current-gen outing for Kratos is being hailed as one of the most impressive-looking games of this generation, but could the humble Speccy do the visuals justice? Of course it could. This *Rastan*-esque *God Of War* game looks superb, with hardly an ounce of colour clash in sight.



» [Spectrum] Hades doesn't stand a chance against the Blades of 8-Bit Chaos.



Retro Booty

TREASURES FROM THE RETRO DEEP



Beggars Belief Energy Drinks

■ **RRP:** £2.50
■ **Buy it from:** www.squareeyed.co.uk

All that avoiding barrels, saving princesses and jumping on turtleshells can take it out of you. So if you suffer from thumb and brain fatigue when playing games then check out these crazy energy drinks featuring old-school gaming heroes Pac-Man, Mario and Donkey Kong. These officially licensed energy drinks will keep those joystick fibres at maximum efficiency.



Headcrab Plushie

■ **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £16) ■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

It's true; turn anything into a plushie doll and it instantly looks insufferably cute. Pencil sharpeners, toothpaste, mole earwax… anything. Don't believe us? Just take a look at this – it's the unsettling, underpant-ruining headcrab aliens from *Half-Life*, but stuffed with cotton wool. They almost look good enough to wrap around your face, don't you think?

TREASURE OF THE MONTH

Console Modder's Toolbox

■ **RRP:** $19.99 (approx £14)
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

Have you ever tried to perform surgery on a games console? It's not easy. Console manufacturers seemingly invest billions of dollars coming with new annoying methods to make opening their machines difficult. Anyone who has ever tried taking one apart with a standard Phillips screwdriver will be aware that games consoles actually melt them on contact, and what you actually need is something known as a Tamper Resistant Torx bit. Sounds pricey, right? Well, actually, no. Thinkgeek is currently selling a complete modding tool kit, comprising of 26 tools, to enable easy access to your Xbox 360, PS3, PS2 and iPhone's insides.





Game Boy Oyster Card Holder

■ **RRP:** £3.95 ■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

If you moved to London recently, chances are that within two minutes of unpacking your stuff you sold or part exchanged your motor vehicle for an Oyster Card and a train warrant. That was a pretty wise move; however, how do you now protect it from London's card-eroding petrol rain clouds? Easy, invest £3.95 in one of these plastic card holders.

Text Adventure T-Shirt

■ **RRP:** £14.95 ■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

You are standing in a brightly lit room. Inside this room the National Supermodel Cheerleader finals are taking place. However, in a panic to catch the bus you have forgotten to dress yourself.

What do you want to do next?

>Use iPhone to order a natty text adventure tee and wait patiently for it to arrive.

Congratulations! The supermodel cheerleaders now want to make out with you.

What do you want to do next?





Mana Potions

■ **RRP:** $19.99 for six (approx £13)
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

You know what this world needs more of? Energy drinks. There aren't enough of the things for our liking. These pages aside, soft and fruit drinks outnumber them by 2800 to 1 according to a recent fabricated poll we found on the internet. Well, this ought to redress the balance a little. It looks like a common drink you'd find in any RPG worth its salt.

TOP FIVE T-SHIRTS



01 Gauntlet
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



02 Amstrad
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



03 Text Adventure
■ **RRP:** $14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



04 Coexist T-Shirt
■ **RRP:** $15.99 - $17.99
■ **Manufacturer:** Thinkgeek.com
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



05 Dizzy
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

TOP FIVE BOOKS



01 Rogue Leaders: The Story Of LucasArts
■ **RRP:** £34.99 ■ **Publisher:** Titan Books
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



02 Classic Home Video Games 1985-1988
■ **RRP:** £8.99 ■ **Publisher:** Random House
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



03 Racing The Beam
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Publisher:** MIT Press
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



04 Game Over
■ **RRP:** £22.14
■ **Publisher:** Cyberactive Media Group
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



05 Gamespite Quarterly: Issue 3
■ **RRP:** From $12 ■ **Author:** Jeremy Parish
■ **Buy it from:** www.gamespite.com

TOP FIVE MISCELLANEOUS



01 Pac-Man Hotplate Holder
■ **RRP:** $14.99 (approx £9)
■ **Manufacturer:** Unknown
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



02 Tabletop Arcade Machine
■ **RRP:** Prices vary from £899-1,199
■ **Manufacturer:** Elite Gaming
■ **Buy it from:** www.elitegaming.org.uk



03 Space Invaders TV Game
■ **RRP:** £9.99 ■ **Manufacturer:** Radica
■ **Buy it from:** www.play.com



04 Headcrab Plushie
■ **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £16)
■ **Manufacturer:** Unknown
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



05 Space Invaders Clock
■ **RRP:** $80 (approx £50)
■ **Manufacturer:** Taito
■ **Buy it from:** www.japantrendshop.com

retroradar

>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RE



* A MOMENT WITH…

Masaya Matsuura

Every issue, we put an industry legend in the hot seat. This month, experimental music game genius Masaya Matsuura

Who is Masaya Matsuura?

After abandoning his career as a J-pop musician, Masaya Matsuura pursued other interests with innovative multimedia projects. His first great videogame success came in the form of a rapping dog named Parappa, the first great superstar within the now-popular music games genre.

Which of your games would you recommend to our readers, and why?
I would recommend *WINtA*, which is the game we're developing for the OneBigGame charity initiative. I'd always rather recommend an upcoming title of ours rather than a title from the past!

What is your proudest memory?
There are a variety of stories, but it's tough to pick a winner. I am no longer able to recall the proudest memories as there are many inappropriate things in everyday reality that take up most of my time!

What's the most difficult thing you've encountered while working on a game?
The most difficult problem is that it's never easy to single out specific problems. The issue is always trying to deduce which is the bigger and gravest difficulty from among all the others.

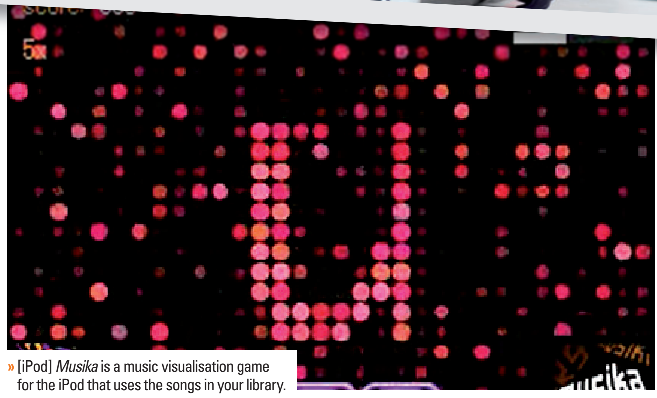
Which industry veteran do you admire?
I respect most of the leading figures in the creative world, particularly those who are older than me.

How would you like your games to be remembered?
As games that embody music and peace.

What opportunities has making videogames given you?
To meet, work, and create with people on an equal stage throughout the world.

What's your darkest memory of being in the games industry?
The one memory I have is actually too dark to talk about!

And your best?
Luckily, I have lots of great stories, but I'll pick out one of the best ones. I experienced it when I visited Bellagio in Italy to attend the wedding of a former staff member from NanaOn-Sha. There was a little boy whose age was around four years old. He had *Tamagotchi Connection: Corner Shop* and was crazy about one of the mini-games called 'Laundromat'. Since his mother came up to me, I thought she was going to complain to me that her son played it too much. But surprisingly she told me: "When he grows up, he will respect the household tasks like laundry, which otherwise his future wife would probably be expected to do. Thank you for creating this great game."



» [iPod] *Musika* is a music visualisation game for the iPod that uses the songs in your library.

> "I want my games to be remembered as games that embody music and peace"

Turn to page 64 for the Making of Vib Ribbon

Are there any greater experiences or compliments for a game designer?
I usually get bored easily but because of my experience, I can still keep motivating myself for the fifth series of the game.

How has the industry changed over the last 20 years?
Since I've been in this industry only for 15 years, it is kind of difficult to compare with the industry 20 years ago. But I think the biggest change is that the internet became a part of the industry… No, it's actually the industry became a part of the internet, and has gradually become more global and package-free. I think the biggest change might be coming in a few years. *



» [PSX] *UmJammer Lammy* was created as a rock-based spin-off of the surprise hit *PaRappa The Rapper*.



retrodiary

30 April – 28 May

>> A month of retro events both past and present



30 April 1991
■ Commodore's CDTV is officially launched at London Piccadilly's BAFTA Centre to invited journalists and software publishers. Yours for just £599.99.



2 May 1985
■ The first issue of Database Publications' new magazine, *Atari User*, goes on general sale.



3 May 1985
■ Firebird releases a compilation of its worst games on the Spectrum with the provocative title of *Don't Buy This*. Thousands do.



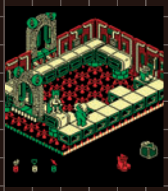
3 May 2002
■ Nintendo releases its new console, the GameCube, in Europe.



9 May 1986
■ Commodore's new machine, the Amiga, makes its official UK debut at the Commodore Show.



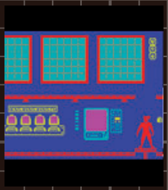
8 May 1998
■ The first in the *Gran Turismo* series of driving games is released in the UK on the PlayStation.



5 May 1986
■ The Ritman/Drummond combo does it again with the release of *Batman*, an isometric masterpiece on the Amstrad and Spectrum.

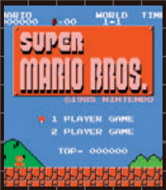


3 May 2003
■ *The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker* is released in Europe on the Nintendo GameCube.



10 May 1985
■ *Frankie Goes To Hollywood*, one of the strangest tie-in games ever, is released on the Spectrum and later the C64.

11 May 1995
■ The first day of the inaugural Electronic Entertainment Expo (aka E3), takes place in Los Angeles.



15 May 1987
■ *Super Mario Bros* is released in the UK. NES owners celebrate wildly.



15 May 2008
■ *Silent Hill Origins*, the fifth instalment of the survival horror series, is released in the UK on the PlayStation 2.



24 May 1972
■ Magnavox demonstrates the first videogames console, the Odyssey, at a convention in Burlingame, California.



20 May 2010
■ *Prince Of Persia: The Forgotten Sands* is due for its European release on the Wii, PS3 and Xbox 360.

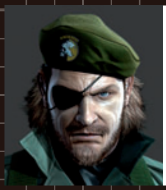


20 May 1983
■ The black box of vector graphic loveliness, the Vectrex, is officially launched in the UK by Milton Bradley Games.

18 May 1973
■ Hudson Soft, the Japanese software publisher and developer, is formed. Among its creations is *Bomberman*.

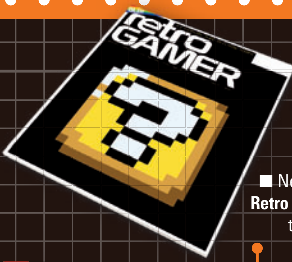


24 May 2002
■ *Super Smash Bros Melee* is released in the UK on the Nintendo GameCube.



27 May 2010
■ Konami's *Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker* is expected to be released in the UK on the Sony PSP.

28 May 1982
■ Trip Hawkins founds the computer games publishing company, Electronic Arts. It does rather well…



27 May 2010
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES



» [Commodore 64] The *Mario*-styled platform game was barely in the shops before being recalled thanks to Nintendo's help.

CHARTS



APRIL 1988

SPECTRUM

1 Platoon (Ocean)
2 OutRun (US Gold)
3 Kikstart 2 (Mastertronic)
4 Ghostbusters (Ricochet)
5 Match Day II (Ocean)

» [Spectrum] *Barbarian II* was bigger but not necessarily better than the original slash-fest.





THE LATEST NEWS FROM MAY 1988

MAY 88 – Starquake shake-up, International Soccer goes into extra time, Gremlin goes for Alternative Games, the Great Giana Sisters withdraw and the legend that is Daley Thompson is back. Richard Burton waggles like stink, releasing his javelin perfectly at 89 degrees…

The Bubble Bus game *Starquake* was on the receiving end of a makeover after being converted to the Atari ST and IBM compatibles. Stephen Crow's splendid arcade adventure featured Blob and his ongoing task to save the universe from suffering a catastrophic planetary chain reaction of destruction, and it looked to be just as good as the 8-bit originals.

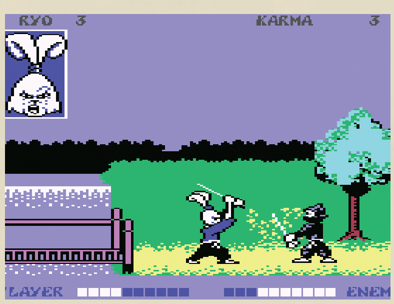
The publisher behind these new conversions was the newly formed Mandarin Software, which had recently made a name for itself by re-releasing enhanced compilations of Level 9's graphic adventures.

In 1983 it was on cartridge and simply the best football game available. Five year later, CRL decided to re-release Commodore's *International Soccer* on cassette and disk for the first time. Although the graphics were the most noticeable part of the game to succumb to the ageing process, the gameplay was still there, being quick and very playable. It compared favourably to the recently released *Match Day II* by Ocean, which looked lovely but suffered from a lack of speed. The only downside was that CRL wanted £9.95 for the cassette version. A bit cheeky, fellas…

Palace Software announced that the sequel to *Barbarian*, its controversial slash-fest released 12 months ago, would be ready to buy within the month. *Barbarian II: The Dungeon Of Drax* would be three months late but would prove to be a suitably worthy sequel.



» [Commodore 64] Whatever you do, do not select Jens Lehmann as your goalkeeper…



» [Commodore 64] *Usagi Yojimbo* was created by Stan Sakai for Dark Horse Comics and converted by Firebird.

With the gameplay branching out into arcade adventure territory but still retaining the broadsword-swinging slash-'em-up action of the original, *Barbarian II* was a commendable game and very well received by the Spectrum and Commodore reviewing fraternity.

With Corinne Russell's appearance as the poster girl for the *Vixen* game the previous month, testosterone was still surging through the hormonally imbalanced bodies of many a teenager at dangerously high levels. It showed no signs of abating, with Maria Whittaker returning to adorn the *Barbarian II* inlay and obligatory glossy poster with a formidable mass of hair and a well-turned ankle.

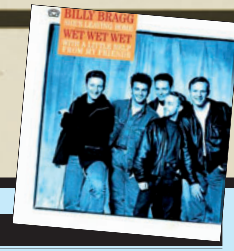
Your forearm was going to take yet more pounding with the news that US Gold and Epyx's latest offering in their ever-expanding line of sporting games was nearing completion. *The Games: Winter Edition* would feature a host of frosty events including the luge, figure-skating and an assortment of skiing disciplines as you waggle and rhythmically twist your joystick.

The Games was certainly easy on the eye and an extremely slick piece of coding, but it never really quite hit the mark like previous offerings such as *World Games* or *California Games* did.

Maybe it was the events that were dull. Had they introduced a British version







AMSTRAD

1. OutRun (US Gold)
2. The Way Of The Exploding Fist (Ricochet)
3. Grand Prix Simulator (Codemasters)
4. Trap Door (Alternative)
5. 3D Starfighter (Codemasters)

COMMODORE 64

1. Ghostbusters (Ricochet)
2. Predator (Activision)
3. Platoon (Ocean)
4. The Way Of The Exploding Fist (Ricochet)
5. Steve Davis Snooker (Blue Ribbon)

MUSIC

1. With A Little Help From My Friends (Wet Wet Wet)
2. Perfect (Fairground Attraction)
3. Theme From S-Express (S-Express)
4. Got To Be Certain (Kylie Minogue)
5. Blue Monday 1988 (New Order)

featuring upside-down bobsleigh, the bin-liner luge and landing on your face from the ski-jump, it may have shifted more copies.

As unlikely as that sounded, Gremlin Graphics was thinking along similar lines. It was ready to release *Alternative World Games* for the Spectrum after reasonable success with the C64 version earlier in the year. Such British 'sporting' favourites as the sack race, pillow fight and welly wanging were among the unusual events to be mastered.

Unfortunately Gremlin's parody of the US Gold *Games* series was awful, with blocky graphics and unresponsive controls.

If the C64 version was the bronze medal winner on the podium, the Spectrum version was the girl who brought the flowers out at the medal ceremony only to slip over, impaling herself on a javelin.

With the summer Olympics in Seoul due to start in September, the distinct sporting flavour of previews was still prevalent, and none more so than Ocean Software revealing that it had once again secured the licensing rights to an old friend…

Four years since the enormously successful *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*, a new tie-in game, tentatively called *Daley Thompson 88*, would feature the tried and tested arm-wrenching waggle-fests of old but would also offer fitness and training stages that build you up for the main decathlon.

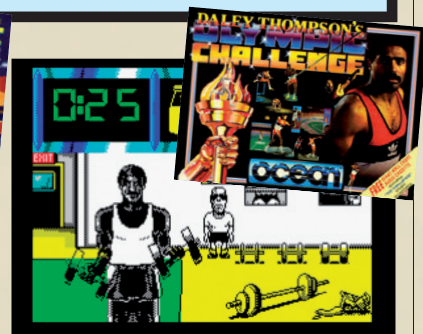


» [PC] There was a treat in store for PC owners when Stephen Crow's classic 8-bit platform maze game got a conversion.

The game was renamed as *Daley Thompson's Olympic Challenge* and was released on the big three 8-bit systems as well as the Amiga and ST. It sold relatively well and was an improvement on the original game in terms of both graphics and gameplay.

Rainbow Arts was almost ready to release its new game but was seemingly unaware that it was heading straight into Nintendo courtroom territory. Its *Mario*-esque platform game, *The Great Giana Sisters*, was ready for release on the C64, with the Amiga version well under way.

Apart from creating a splendid game, Rainbow Arts made an instant collectable when Nintendo forced it to be withdrawn due to similarities with *Mario*. The C64 and Amiga versions were withdrawn and the Spectrum version was never released.

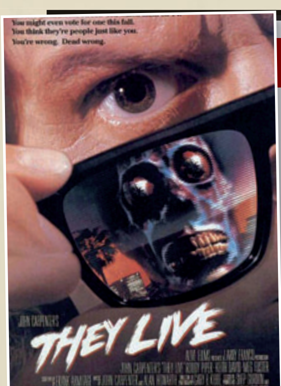


» [Spectrum] The legend is back and so are broken joysticks, keyboards punched in frustration and throbbing biceps…

Ironically, Nintendo released a DS version of *Giana Sisters* in 2009, just six months before Armin Gessert, the programmer behind the original, passed away. He had also been involved with the DS version.

Among the reviews of the multiformat magazines, *ACE* rewarded *Oids* (Mirrorsoft, Atari ST), *Magnetron* (Firebird, Spectrum), *Dungeon Master* (Mirrorsoft, Atari ST) and *Driller* (Incentive, PC) with a thumbs-up.

The cream of the crop in *The Games Machine* were *Ikari Warriors* (Elite, C64), *USAS* (Konami, MSX II), *Sidewinder* (Mastertronic, Amiga), *Cybernoid* (Hewson, C64), *Strike Fleet* (Electronic Arts, C64), *Rastan* (Imagine, Spectrum), *Pinball Construction Set* (Electronic Arts, PC), *Pac-Land* (Quicksilva, C64), *Samurai Warrior: The Battles Of Usagi Yojimbo* (Firebird, C64) and *Jet* (SubLogic, Amiga).



» "I have come here to chew bubblegum and kick ass… and I'm all out of bubblegum." Oh deary deary me…

MAY 1988 NEWS

6 May saw Graeme Hick score the biggest innings in England since 1895. The Worcestershire batman scored an incredible 405 not out against Somerset at Taunton. Hick, born in Zimbabwe, later played for England in a rather hit and miss international career.

15 May saw the beginning of the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan by the Soviet Union, which had invaded the country in December 1979. The resultant losses had been severe for both sides: 90,000 Afghan soldiers and 22,000 Soviets killed.

The invasion resulted in a boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics by many Western nations. Over 65 nations pulled out, with just 80 taking part.

14 May saw one of the greatest upsets in FA Cup history when Wimbledon defeated Liverpool in the FA Cup Final. The London club had only been part of the league football structure for 11 years and the top division for just two of those.

A Lawrie Sanchez header was enough to beat Liverpool, who also had a penalty saved when Dave Beasant blocked John Aldridge's spot kick – the first missed penalty in an FA Cup Final.

19 May was the premiere of John Carpenter's *They Live*, starring wrestler 'Rowdy' Roddy Piper. With the aid of a pair of special sunglasses, he discovers that aliens walk among us while the world is saturated with subliminal messages.



» But for the ongoing ban on English clubs in Europe, we could have seen Vinnie Jones biting the legs off continental players…

THIS MONTH IN...



YOUR SINCLAIR

With *Vixen* on the cover and a feature in the middle, it was good to see *YS* exploiting the world of Page 3 models to maximum effect. Not that we're complaining, of course. There was also a *Vixen* poster should the one you got with the game become… worn out…





THE GAMES MACHINE

Mel Croucher was once again delving into the pasts of various software company figureheads, this time enquiring about their first job. Jeff Minter cleaned the toilets at a factory while Andrew Hewson was a bingo caller. House!





SINCLAIR USER

SU's Outlands column again highlighted the important subjects in gaming. This month it was fast food, with ratings based on which was served quickest, tasted best and value. Fish and chips triumphed, of course.



BACK TO THE NINETIES



» [Amiga] Comic Relief charity game *Sleepwalker* was original and pretty but let down by being too difficult.



» [SNES] *Troddlers* had similarities to *Lemmings* but rather than control the creatures you place stones to guide them to the exit.



» [Mega-CD] Another *Sonic*/*Mario* rip-off? Yes, but exceedingly well done and particularly playable on the Mega-CD.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM NOVEMBER 1992

NOVEMBER 1992 – Magazines come and go, Ocean gets Comic Relief, Mega Drive SF II on the way, Mortal Kombat up for the fight, Storm gets Troddled while SNES Vikings get lost. Richard Burton dons a horny helmet and goes on a pillage…

Europress Impact's new magazine, *Amiga Force*, was finally available after the success of its issue zero taster. It started life as a bi-monthly magazine but quickly made the transition to a monthly after just two issues.

Europress also ended a Commodore institution this month with the final official issue of *Zzap!64*. Originally published by Newsfield Publications, Europress took over publishing of the magazine from issue 79 in December 1991.

The direction and design of *Zzap!64* had changed significantly from the original concept, with much of it planted firmly in an older era of home computing. So the November '92 issue, number 90, would be the last… sort of…

The magazine would be relaunched as *Commodore Force* in January. It was still very sad to see the last of the three Newsfield 8-bit magazines that many had grown up with and followed religiously as their interest in gaming blossomed finally depart. It was truly the end of an era, although one Mr Lloyd Mangram lived on in the pages of the new magazine.

CPC Attack, the relatively new Amstrad magazine, curled up and died after just six issues. Having taken over the reins of *Amstrad Computer User* in May, *CPC Attack* ditched anything vaguely related to serious computing and concentrated on gaming with a rather colourful, comic-like style. Unfortunately, it failed spectacularly.

Completing a busy month of magazine comings and goings was the arrival of *Super Play* from Future Publishing. It had a bold layout with a more adult feel to it than other gaming magazines.

Ocean Software, never one to miss a licensing opportunity, announced that it was working on a game for Comic Relief, with a significant proportion of the money from sales going to the fund.

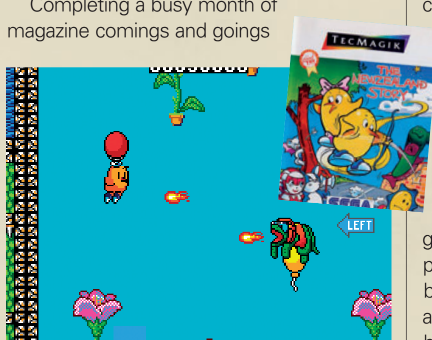
The game was under development and entitled *Sleepwalker*. It would see Ralph the dog attempting to keep Lee, his sleepwalking master, out of harm's way as he ambles around six dangerous levels. As Ralph, you have to guide, shunt and generally broach any gaping chasms that come your way.

It was an interesting, quirky game for a charity offering, which, to be frank, were usually pretty average affairs. Graphically enticing, the game suffered from being frustratingly difficult. Still, a solid game for a good cause available to Amiga, C64 and Atari ST gamers.

Interplay Productions was cranking its PR machine up in readiness for its new SNES game, *The Lost Vikings*. The game was an interesting blend of scrolling platforming and puzzle elements solved by your three Viking characters. Each had a unique skill to utilise, and you can switch between each Viking at any point in the game and had to do so frequently. Although the character-swapping mechanics of the



» [Amiga] If you liked *Strider* then you'd like this. Yet another excellent offering from Team17.



» [Master System] Taito's cutesy platform game arrives on the SMS in a blaze of gaudy colour. It played very well, though.

NOVEMBER 1992 NEWS

4 November saw Bill Clinton oust President George Bush to become the third-youngest president in American history. The voters took to the polling booths in high numbers and took Governor Clinton to the White House with over twice as many electoral votes as President Bush.

11 November saw the Church of England vote on allowing women to become priests. After a lengthy debate, it was passed by just two votes. Traditionalists were not happy. Dawn French was ecstatic…

More voting on 25 November, when the Czechoslovakia Federal Assembly voted on the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. From 1 January 1993, the country would be split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

On 20 November Windsor Castle suffered a fire that endangered the entire castle and the priceless artwork inside. Most of the valuables were saved but over 100 rooms were damaged, leaving a repair bill of £40 million. To help fund the rebuilding, the Queen opened Buckingham Palace to the public, but to add to her financial woes, it was also announced on 26 November that the Queen would be liable to pay income tax from next year.



» Female priests are finally a reality in the Church of England. The cult of Dibley soon follows…



» Bill Clinton celebrates becoming President of the United States by treating us all to his Tommy Cooper impression. Spoon, jar, jar, spoon…

game did take a little time to master, it was certainly worth persevering.

Mega Drive, Amiga and PC conversions followed after the success of the original SNES game, with a GBA version appearing a mere ten years after the original.

SNES owners had been flaunting their copies of *Street Fighter II* in front of Mega Drive owners' noses since it was launched. The Capcom beat-'em-up was a superb conversion of the arcade game, but no news was forthcoming on a Mega Drive conversion. That was until Capcom let slip a tentative release date of summer '93.

It would be a conversion of the *Special Champion Edition*, which had the added bonus of being able to control the four bosses and fight the character that you're controlling. Still wasn't a patch on the SNES version, though.

Not so good for *Street Fighter* sales but excellent for fans of beat-'em-ups was that the arcade hit *Mortal Kombat* was going to be converted by Acclaim for an array of consoles, including the SNES and Mega Drive. Let battle commence…

Coming soon to the SNES thanks to Storm was *Troddlers*. No, it wasn't an earthy English ale but a game in which you have to recapture little creatures with an annoying habit of getting into sticky situations. Yes, it was clearly influenced by *Lemmings*, but it was a very good game in its own right and, as such, was later translated onto the Amiga and PC.

With *Chuck Rock* riding high in the charts, Core Design was again ploughing the well-worn furrow of the scrolling platform game. Its current project was *Wonder Dog*, which was to be exclusive to the Mega-CD, although it did eventually get a belated conversion to the Amiga.

Wonder Dog turned out to be a hugely enjoyable game. It had a hint of *Sonic The Hedgehog* without all the speed but also had elements of *Super Mario Land*.

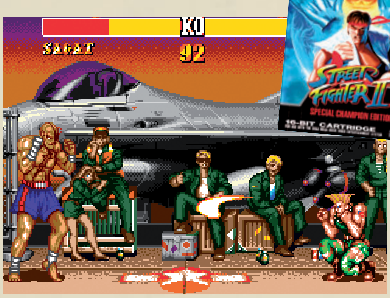
Wonder Dog was pitched somewhere between the two and, as such, benefited from having the best of both worlds: a cracking arcade adventure with good pace and exploration aplenty.

Sega Force appraised the latest bunch of Sega gaming goodness with *Twinkle Tale* (WAS, Mega Drive) and *The New Zealand Story* (Tecmagick, Master System) being honoured with a *Sega Force* Smash.

Magazine rival *Mean Machines Sega* also had a tasty bunch of games to analyse, with Mega Game status being awarded to *Road Rash II* (Electronic Arts, Mega Drive) and *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* (Sega, Mega Drive and Master System).

The One Amiga avoided having superlative-sounding awards for its highest-rated games and so was content to stick with percentage scoring. Its best of the best of the best this month were *Wing Commander* (Origin), *Pinball Fantasies* (21st Century), *Shadoworlds* (Krisalis), *The Legend Of Kyrandia* (Virgin Games) and *Assassin* (Team17).





» [Mega Drive] It may very well have been the *Special Champion Edition* but it still didn't play as well as the SNES version.

THIS MONTH IN…

SEGA FORCE



The focus for this month was Sensible Software and its spokesman John Hare. The topic was its new Mega Drive project *Mega-Lo-Mania*, which John insisted was not an RPG. *Sensible Soccer* received a mention, with news of a belated Mega Drive conversion.



SUPER PLAY



The new mag kicked off with an interview with Richard Kay and Mike Webb, responsible for assorted *Bubble Bobble* ports. Their claim to fame was that they were the first outside Japan to get a SNES dev licence, even beating Nintendo of America.



MEAN MACHINES SEGA



It was here at last. *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* was dissected, resulting in a 96% score. As the reviewer put it: "*Sonic 2* is the most impressive rollercoaster, pinball, one-armed bandit, platform game to date."

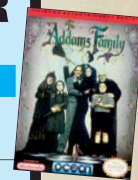


CHARTS

NOVEMBER 1992

NES

1 The Addams Family (Ocean)
2 Super Mario Bros 3 (Nintendo)
3 Chip 'N Dale: Rescue Rangers (Capcom)
4 WWF WrestleMania (Acclaim)
5 Track & Field II (Konami)



SNES

1 Street Fighter II (Capcom)
2 Super Probotector: Alien Rebels (Konami)
3 The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past (Nintendo)
4 Super Adventure Island (Hudson Soft)
5 The Addams Family (Ocean)



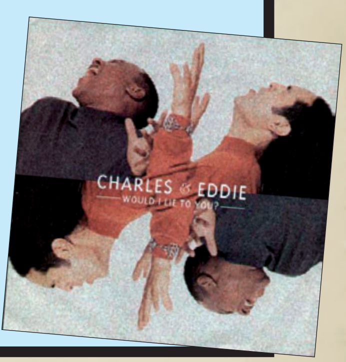
MEGA DRIVE

1 Alien 3 (Arena Entertainment)
2 European Club Soccer (Virgin Games)
3 Taz-Mania (Sega)
4 Ayrton Senna's Super Monaco GP II (Sega)
5 Chuck Rock (Virgin Games)



MUSIC

1 Would I Lie To You? (Charles & Eddie)
2 End Of The Road (Boyz II Men)
3 I Will Always Love You (Whitney Houston)
4 People Everyday (Arrested Development)
5 Boss Drum (Shamen)

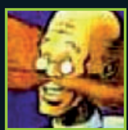


retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL

Alien 3: The Gun

FAITHFUL TO THE FILM? WHO CARES?

#24



» ARCADE
» SEGA
» 1993

This story begins with a retro sport as much as a retro game. They're on the way out now, but my dad would regularly haul a younger me and a friend out to a dry ski slope. In retrospect I can see the benefit: bashing us up and down that savage side, with all of the wind and the cold and the damp but none of the snow for a soft landing… It certainly had a clarifying effect on developing our technique!

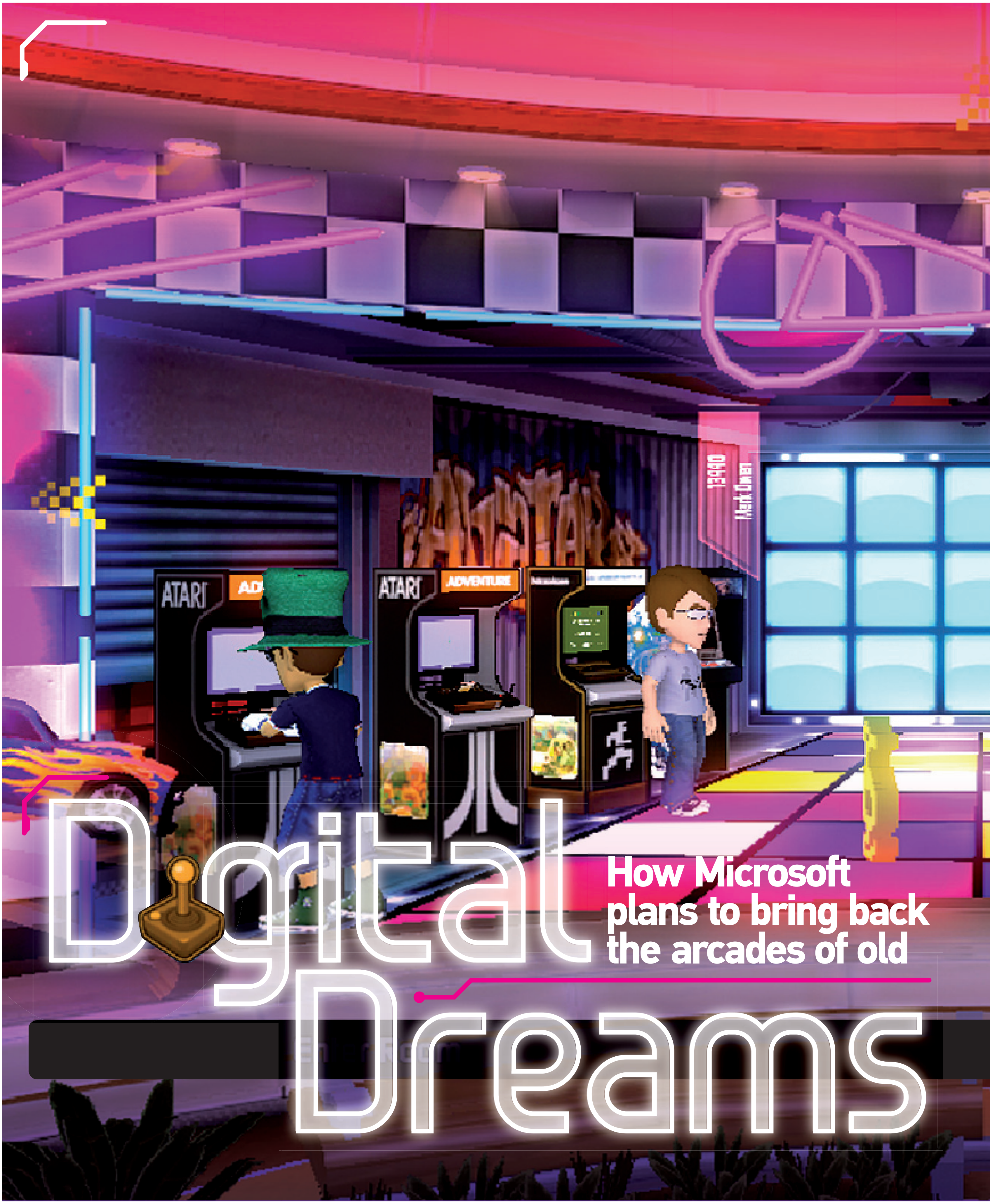
Assuming that we didn't flense our skin off our faces with a tumble on that wire-brush hillside, my dad would reward our good performance with a service-station Burger King on the way home, and what was even more appealing than warming up with a piping-hot Whopper was the station's rank of arcade machines – and that's something you never see today either, with slots ousting them everywhere. The brightness of the arcade was a revitalising surge after being battered and bruised in the turgid winter evening gloom of the dry ski slope, and *Alien 3: The Gun* was the stunning chief fixture.

Alien 3 went leagues beyond the other shoot-'em-ups that I had been exposed to at the time, such as *Lethal Enforcers* and its flat, interminable, cardboard cut-out shooting gallery. The cabinet impressed on approach with its awesomely solid and weighty weapons – a stark contrast to the flaccid pastel pink and blue of other arcade guns. The game itself only piled up feat upon achievement upon triumph. It had depth; it had colour. You weren't limited to having a weedy little pinprick on the screen to mark your shot; you could drench the entire screen in an immolating conflagration. Enemies didn't just flicker and vanish when shot – the xenomorphs would thrash, and screech, and erupt, and keep coming! My friend and I desperately hosed them with relentless fire, trying to pin them in place with bullet streams, but they flailed around them – spraying blood and body parts even as they crashed forward into a collision. It was terrifying. It was glorious. *





Want to appear in the magazine? Be sure to upload your classic profiles at www.retrogamer.net



Digital Dreams

How Microsoft plans to bring back the arcades of old



Q&A Franz Lanzinger

Developer: *Crystal Castles, Gubble*

What do you think about Game Room?
I think it's a great idea and it's very nice of Microsoft to promote those classic games. I do hope that Microsoft doesn't forget to credit the people who made the original games and not just the people who did the conversion to the 360. It would be like crediting the people who programmed the DVD extras on *Casablanca* while removing all references to Humphrey Bogart.

All the XBLA versions of old arcade games are guilty of this today, so I hope it gets fixed in Game Room.

How do you feel about your games being made available to a new generation of gamers?
I definitely have mixed feelings about it. On the one hand it's great that the old games aren't entirely forgotten; on the other hand the games were designed to be played in an arcade with arcade controls. Many games suffer greatly when ported to the 360 controller, especially the trackball games.

Why do you think the arcades of old were so important?
The arcade games of the Seventies and Eighties were at the forefront of game development. Many technical and game design innovations that are still with us today were first invented for those old arcade games. For example, we have high-score tables, power-ups, run and jump controls, level editors, boss battles, and even the whole idea of having levels that increase in difficulty, just to name a few.

What's your favourite arcade game and why?
Definitely *Millipede* with the trackball controller. It just feels so solid, and it's tuned perfectly. There's nothing as satisfying as shooting dozens of mosquitoes and clearing the entire screen. Although I actually helped a little on designing and testing *Millipede*, full credit should go to Ed Logg for designing and programming this masterpiece. My initials are 'FXL' in the default high-score table, and Ed's are 'ED'. Atari coin-ops didn't allow full-name credits during the early Eighties.

We're thankfully a little too young to remember the Seventies, but the Eighties were a fantastic period that will stay with us forever. The last ever *Star Wars* film – or so we thought – was released, we'd rush home from school to watch the latest instalment of *Dungeons & Dragons*, walk around with our Walkmans, desperately try to look cool while sporting a mullet and tight nylon blue shorts and, best of all, we'd hang out in arcades.

Oh yes, the arcade: all smoky haze, exotic sounds and flashing lights, constantly tempting you to part with your hard-earned cash… okay, the pocket money that you had scrounged off your mum. It was a wonderful time to be a kid, and visiting the local arcade would become a weekly religion. We'll never forget the first play we had on *Pac-Man*, the sheer wave of elation that washed over us when we completed all four stages of *Donkey Kong*, and the massive adrenaline rush that titles such as *After Burner II* and *Space Harrier* offered. Lovingly crafted with beautifully designed controls, hanging out in an arcade was the equivalent of staring at beautiful works of art in a gallery, and we still remember the feeling we got when we first encountered the hydraulic version of *OutRun* and the joy of discovering *Strider* for the first time while on holiday on Barry Island.

The beauty of being at the arcades was that every week – especially if your local arcade was in a good spot – there would always be new games to experience. One week you'd be hammering away at *Crime Fighters*, the next you'd discover a new shoot-'em-up like *Forgotten Worlds* or were hammering for a high score on *S.T.U.N. Runner*. There was always something new and exciting to discover; new sights to see, new music to listen to, new attack waves to memorise. It was a golden time to be a 12-year-old kid – this would have been 1984 – and even if you only had a quid, you could easily spend an entire day just watching and learning from your peers.

This was part of the real magic of the arcade scene in the mid-Eighties to early Nineties. It wasn't just a place to hang out; it was also a place to learn. Our local arcade featured an amazing array of machines – it's now sadly full of fruit machines and one-credit, one-play *Guitar Hero*-like titles – and there were some truly fantastic players there. Watching someone effortlessly hammer their way through *Defender* or reach the final level of *Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles* was almost as mesmerising as the phosphorus glow that *Asteroids* and *Tempest* would give off, and we've lost count of the number of hours spent just learning, discovering a game's secrets and then using them to best the high scores.

Nowadays, of course, those days are long gone. Granted, you'll still find the hardcore enjoying the latest beat-'em-ups in the few big arcades

Game Room

THE LINE UP

Adventure

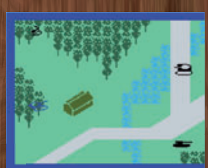
Year Released: 1979
Publisher: Atari **Format:** Atari 2600



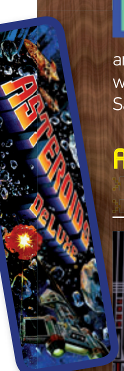
There's no denying that *Adventure* is superb. However, it's not really suited for Game Room, as it doesn't offer the same challenges that many other titles on the service do. Oh, and regular freelancer Ashley Day was able to complete it on the ten-minute demo.

Armor Battle

Year Released: 1979
Publisher: Mattel **Format:** Intellivision



Armor Battle suffers on Game Room because there is currently no two-player support online. Sure, you could play it with a friend and it's still a lot of fun, but this is a live arena and we want to be able to challenge all our friends. Save your Points for something else instead.



Asteroids Deluxe

Year Released: 1980
Publisher: Atari **Format:** Arcade



While not perfectly emulated – the background is missing and the asteroids can occasionally be hard to see – *Asteroids Deluxe* is a fantastic blaster. The shield adds a deep layer of strategy, while the new killer satellite keeps you on your toes.

Astrosmash

Year Released: 1981
Publisher: Mattel **Format:** Intellivision



Extremely clever shoot-'em-up that features a great risk and reward system, as the player must shoot down every asteroid or lose points whenever they hit the ground. The graphics, while blocky, hold up well, and the controls are well-suited to the 360's pad.

Battlantis

Year Released: 1987
Publisher: Konami **Format:** Arcade



Konami's take on *Space Invaders* is an enjoyable shoot-'em-up that's only let down by its ridiculous toughness. Emulation appears to be spot-on, the music sounds brilliant, and there's a nice range of power-ups. It will be far too tough for many, though.

Digital Dreams



Q&A John Salwitz

Developer: *Paperboy, Klax, 720°, Rampart*

What do you think about Game Room?
To be honest, this is the first I have heard of it. Of course, I am happy to see these games continue to get an audience. However, my general impression of recent versions of my arcade games has been mixed, particularly when it comes to the controls. The effort around these ports is limited and games that were designed to be played on large cabinets with dedicated buttons do not necessarily translate well to systems with small controllers. Most of the time, in my opinion, these control problems could be fixed but are not.
The concept, however, seems really cool. I would like it if they spent time recreating the cabinets. I also like the payment method, as it makes sense. The socialisation concept is fantastic.

What do you think about your games being enjoyed by a new generation of gamers through Game Room?
I am pleased if people are still enjoying the games I worked on. I am also thrilled to have a location that my daughters can see my work. Hopefully, they will like them too!

Why were the arcades of the Eighties so popular?
The games were great. Beyond that, it was a shared experience; everyone there was a gamer. Also, the soundscape was pretty amazing. You could hear the arcade a long time before you saw it. There is nothing like that now, which is a real pity.

What's the definitive arcade game?
There is no single definitive arcade game. *Paperboy* was pretty good, although I suppose *Asteroids* had its merits!

that are still available in London and some of our bigger cities, and the arcade scene is still thriving in Japan. Hell, you might even find a kebab shop that still has a dusty old cabinet tucked away in the corner, but for the average gamer those halcyon days are pretty much gone forever. Or are they?

Game Room is Microsoft's attempt to bring back the glory days of the arcades of old, in a new, more palatable digital form that can be enjoyed by both the young and old. Combining elements of both Nintendo's Virtual Console service and Sony's PlayStation Home, Microsoft and developer Krome Studios are trying to recapture the glory days of our youth, and while it's certainly suffered from teething problems, it's already starting to meet the lofty expectations that we had when it was first announced.

"The idea for Game Room began in a meeting with myself and Marc Whitten [general manager of Xbox Live]," begins Frank Pape, senior director at Microsoft Game Studios. "I've always loved the classic arcade and console games, and we had been talking about ways to emulate these retro games for the modern day living room. From that one meeting, the concept of Game Room was born.



We teamed with the developers at Krome in late November of 2008, and are now launching a fun way for you and your friends to relive the glory days of the classic arcade. Game Room brings you and your friends 30 retro arcade and console games including *Centipede*, *Asteroids Deluxe*, and *Super Cobra*, and makes it easy for you to play together whether you're sitting on the same couch, or on different continents."

What we like most about Game Room is its actual setup. It's a little unwieldy when you first join due to the sheer number of options on offer, but once you work out how to navigate both your arcade and the game's many menus, you'll find it a joy to use. It's possible to arrange rooms however you like, add arcade machines, and even place props to make your own distinctive arcade. The new Avatar setup has gelled with everyone, with some claiming it to be nothing more than a lazy, unwieldy front-end, but there's something utterly charming about watching your friends' Avatars walking around your arcade that we find difficult to ignore.

And it's a huge arcade that has an astonishing amount of potential. Spread across three huge multi-tiered layers, each large floor contains four sections, which in turn can house up to eight cabinets, thereby potentially allowing you to fill your virtual space with 96 games. Granted, that's going to set you back a pretty penny, but more on price later.

Some one and a half years in the making, when Microsoft contacted Krome, best known for its work on various children's licences such as *Transformers: Revenge Of The Fallen* and *Scene It? Box Office Smash*, its request was simple: "We just asked [Krome] to create a new part of Xbox Live and Games For Windows Live that would be dedicated to classic games," continues Pape. "There are currently two Game Room teams – one for the Game Room side and one that handles the emulation – and they have been working on it closely together since November 2008



» [360] There are three medals awarded on most games. The more medals you earn, the higher your overall ranking.



and continue to iterate on it. It's been a long ride since then and one we wouldn't have missed for the world. We got to play all of our favourite games again and work with our old friends the Z80 and 6502!"

Now if there's one area where we feel that Game Room could improve, it's in the quality of the actual emulation, as we'd be lying if we said that it was bang-on perfect, although it's been admittedly quite a while since we've played the original arcade games. *Asteroids Deluxe*, for example, is missing its background, which is made even stranger due to the fact that it is there when you're looking at the machine from the menu, and certain titles can feel rather choppy – although interestingly, we've noticed this more on high-definition setups. It should also be noted that there can be a very occasional pause when playing – although this only happens when connected to Game Room's online servers. What we will say, though, is that while the emulation may not be 100 per cent accurate, all the included games are perfectly playable and the arcade titles especially are a hell of a lot of fun. Admittedly, playing the likes of *Centipede* and *Crystal Castles* on an analogue pad is never going to be a match for a trackball, but until an official peripheral comes out – please release one, Microsoft – this is as close as you're going to get to ever owning a proper arcade

"There's something charming about watching your friends explore your arcade"

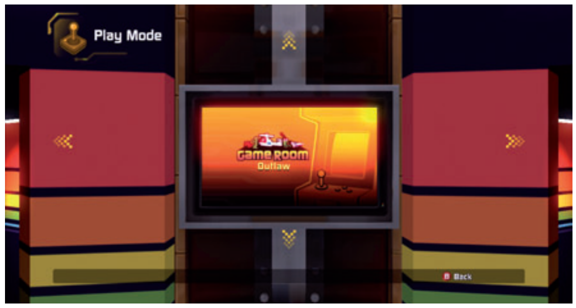
COMMUNITY FEATURES ARE THE HEART OF GAME ROOM

without having to invest the money and space needed for the real thing.

The emulation issue is something that Microsoft is all too aware of, stating it to be one of the trickiest tasks that Krome faced when creating Game Room. "Making sure that the games are being faithfully emulated has always been our top priority," says Pape. "We have the original arcade boards and console games in the office and play them side by side with Game Room to ensure that even the tiniest detail is intact."

Game Room launched with 30 games consisting of 15 arcade titles, seven Atari 2600 titles and eight Intellivision games. The launch itself, however, was marred somewhat by a few technical hitches that saw the service finally going live sometime in the afternoon. "An overwhelming interest from the community did cause some users to experience issues at launch," admits Pape. "Overall response so far, though, has been amazing, and we thank everyone for their patience as we continue to look at new ways to provide the best possible experience with Game Room."

Another aspect of Game Room that is proving impossible to ignore is the fact that it's impossible to transfer Live Arcade games that you already own to the new service. With titles like *Centipede*, *Scramble* and *Asteroids Deluxe* already available on both formats, it will be seen by many as nothing more than simple greed. From our point of view, while it's obviously frustrating, Game Room's excellent ability to send challenges on these games and the better video modes that are offered more than make



» [360] Adverts for upcoming titles are available, but they're nowhere near as pronounced as they are in PlayStation Home.



» [360] Game Room really comes into its own when you get a group of friends together for a competition. It's an excellent experience that no other system currently offers.



Q&A Eugene Jarvis

Developer: ***Defender, Robotron: 2084, Stargate***

> What do you think about Game Room?
If you missed the Eighties due to excessive youth or excessive substance abuse then this is the way to relive the arcade glory days!

> How do you feel when your games are made available to a new generation of gamers?
It's awesome for kids to check out the classics and explore the history of videogames through an arcade experience. Future developers can really get a great foundation in the fundamentals of design, or maybe just waste some time having fun! But unfortunately, like virtual sex, there is always something missing: sometimes you just have to grab a real joystick!

> Why were the arcades of old so important?
Because they introduced the world to the wonder of virtual universes where imagination reigned supreme, unrestrained by physical law. The combination of crazy technology, escapist fantasy and the social scene allowed humans to transcend the humdrum realities of meat space. Ever since, we have been trying to turn everything into an arcade. That's what the internet is really all about.

> What's your favourite arcade game and why?
Robotron is the greatest f**king game ever. Sorry, *Mario*.



Q&A Steve Bristow

Developer: ***Tank***

> What do you think of Game Room?
I like what I've seen and think it's a great idea.

> How do you feel when your games are made available to a new generation of gamers?
It's really good to introduce games that were not just twitch and hit games like the Japanese fighting games, or don't require photorealistic movie scripts and video to be fun to play.

> Why were the arcades of old so important?
They had to collect quarters, so you needed to ensure that your games were entertaining by giving them superior gameplay.

COMBAT

Centipede

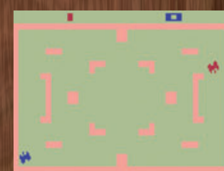
> Year Released: 1980
> Publisher: Atari **> Format:** Arcade



The Xbox's pad and analogue stick is no match for a trackball, but *Centipede* is still a tremendously challenging experience. The emulation looks excellent and it remains as ridiculously addictive as ever. An extremely solid game that should be in everyone's virtual arcade.

Combat

> Year Released: 1977
> Publisher: Atari **> Format:** Atari 2600



Combat is tremendous fun, but it hasn't converted over to Game Room very well. With no two-player support – you can only play it locally with a friend – *Combat* is a massively missed opportunity that just doesn't work in its current form. Highly disappointing.

Crystal Castles

> Year Released: 1983
> Publisher: Atari **> Format:** Arcade



If Microsoft releases a mouse for Game Room, *Crystal Castles* will be superb. As it stands, it remains an excellent game that's only slightly let down by its all-too-sensitive controls. You quickly get used to it, but it's no substitute for the real thing.

Finalizer: Super Transformation

> Year Released: 1985
> Publisher: Konami **> Format:** Arcade



Generic shoot-'em-up that sees you flying over the United States and shooting down waves of aliens. The crash power-up is a nice touch, but this suffers from uninteresting attack waves and garish backgrounds that make spotting bullets difficult.

Football

> Year Released: 1980
> Publisher: Mattel **> Format:** Intellivision



Here's another Intellivision game that's ill-suited for Game Room because it's impossible to play online against your friends. We're sure that this will be sorted eventually, but odds are that by the time support does come along there will be far better examples to play.



» [360] Should you wish to, there are plenty of props that can be used to add atmosphere to your arcade.



up for the 240-Point cost per game. It's a stand that Pape also shares.

"To be perfectly clear, there is no refund for Xbox Live Arcade games that are purchased and downloaded outside Game Room as they are developed differently than those titles available within Game Room," he explains. "We are proud to offer our community a choice: Game Room remains true to the retro arcades of the Seventies, Eighties and Nineties and offers titles in their original format. In Game Room, players may emulate the original arcade experience, invite friends to try their games, compete across universal leaderboards and enjoy a seamless experience across both the Xbox 360 and a Windows PC. For those that prefer a more modern touch, stylised version of these classics will remain available for download on Xbox Live Arcade."

The pricing structure of Game Room is also an issue that could see potential customers staying away, especially when certain titles like *Combat*, *Football* and *Sub Hunt* just don't offer the same immediate value as the many arcade classics that have been included. All the current games, regardless of system, cost 240 Microsoft Points to purchase on either Xbox Live or Games For Windows. Alternatively, you can pay 40 Points for a single play or 400 Points to own the game on both formats. Now to us, 240 Points for a version of *Asteroids Deluxe* that plays perfectly well – even without the background – is an absolute bargain, but some are still complaining that £2 is too much for a classic game compared to titles on services like Apple's App Store or even the 360's Indie Games service. With many claiming it to be little more than a cynical attempt to part users from their hard-earned cash, we were interested to see what Microsoft felt about the current backlash from certain parts of the Xbox community.

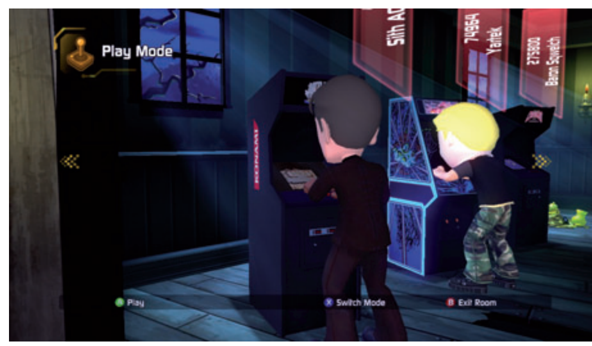
"We see Game Room as a destination, a place where you can relive the glory days of the retro arcade and have fun with your friends," explains Pape. "Your Game Room is completely customisable, so you can stock it with the titles you love, arrange your arcade cabinets the way you want, and play whenever you want. Additionally, Game Room is a seamless experience across platforms – the games you know and love are available to play across your Xbox 360 and Windows PC."

Game Room's biggest enemy is undoubtedly software like MAME, because, let's face it, when you can play nigh-on perfect conversions for absolutely nothing, then even £2 for a blast on *Asteroids* or *Centipede* is going to be far too expensive for some. It's a by-product of our time and something that we can't ever see Microsoft circumventing. We were keen to interview the MAME team about their own thoughts on Game Room and their opinion on the quality of the emulation, but unfortunately they declined to reply.

If there is one thing that puzzles us about Game Room's current setup then it's the inclusion of the many Atari 2600 and Intellivision games. Not only do many of them seem unfairly priced next to the arcade titles that are on offer, but if we're really honest the vast majority of the current console games just seem out of place, primarily because many of them lack the immediacy of their arcade counterparts and don't appear to fit in with the Game Room experience that Microsoft and Krome are so keen on pushing.

There's no doubting the excellent presentation that allows you to play around with switches on the 2600 titles and add the original graphic layers to the Intellivision games, but the inability to currently play these games online means that many of them, geared towards local multiplayer as they are, just don't feel like great value for money, which is a real pity as titles like *Combat*, *Armor Battle* and *Outlaw* are tremendous fun. Of course, Microsoft could start bringing a similar pricing tier system like it has done with Live Arcade, but we see even that as being fraught with issues, as developers would obviously want to charge higher prices, particularly when later games appear on the system. It's another example of Krome and Microsoft being stuck between a rock and a hard place.

Despite the negativity that has surrounded Game Room's launch, we still feel that the vast majority of users are either judging the experience too harshly and quickly, or that they're simply missing the bigger picture. Many appear to be judging Game Room as little more than a compilation of



Game Room: The Line Up

Gravitar
- **Year Released:** 1982
- **Publisher:** Atari
- **Format:** Arcade

As with many of the current games available on Game Room, *Gravitar* is let down slightly by not having its arcade controls. It's also far tougher than many of the Atari classics, meaning that even the included demo would be enough to convince some. Stick with it, though; it's pure gold.



Jungler
- **Year Released:** 1981
- **Publisher:** Konami
- **Format:** Arcade



We really like *Jungler*. Maybe it's because it's a shoot-'em-up, or perhaps it's down to the way it cleverly combines several different genres, but we find it compelling. It's certainly not to everyone's tastes, but if you're looking for something a little different it's well worth the 240-Point asking price to own it.



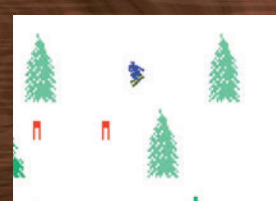
Lunar Lander
- **Year Released:** 1979
- **Publisher:** Atari
- **Format:** Arcade

No matter how many attempts we try, we're still rubbish at *Lunar Lander*. Maybe we lack the dexterity to land that little craft, but we always seem to crash. That doesn't stop it from being worryingly addictive, however, and constant challenges from better players drag us back.

Millipede
- **Year Released:** 1982
- **Publisher:** Atari
- **Format:** Atari 2600

Releases like *Millipede* concern us, mainly because there is no need for this to be on Game Room when a superior arcade version is already available, even if it is fun. It smacks of the Virtual Console approach of releasing inferior ports before giving you access to the proper experience.





Mountain Madness Super Pro Skiing
- **Year Released:** 1980
- **Publisher:** Mattel
- **Format:** Intellivision

Now here's a game to avoid like the plague. Clunky controls, slow gameplay and duff collision detection all combine to create one of the worst games on Game Room. How this fits into the ethos of the classic arcade scene is anyone's guess.



Q&A Bob Polaro



Developer: *Defender* (2600), *Road Runner* (2600)

What do you think about Game Room?
I think it's a really good idea.

Do you like your games being available to a new generation of gamers?
It's a great feeling and I'm always really flattered.

Why were the arcades so important?
We had to make the best use of original ideas, which many of today's games are lacking.

What's your favourite arcade game?
It has to be *Daytona USA*, especially when it's hooked up to four players. The hydraulics were the best.

Q&A Steve Wiebe



Donkey Kong Jr world record holder

What do you think of Game Room?
I think it's a great product that will allow the new generation of gamers a chance to play some of the great classics.

Would you consider attempting any high scores on it?
Definitely, but my first priority is still to set records on the original stand-up arcade games.

What do you think of the leaderboard service?
Having automatic score updates would be a great thing for gamers to have so they can have up-to-date information on their competitors' scores. So there would be no mystery score lurking, waiting to be turned in.

Why are people compelled to chase high scores?
I think the competitive nature of people is what drives them to do what they do best. People need something to feel good about and excelling in any activity provides that validation.

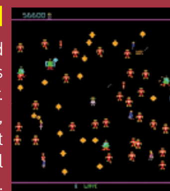
Why was the arcade scene so popular?
The Eighties was the dawn of videogames and the novelty of gaming just took off due to a new form of entertainment. With the advent of home consoles, the arcades faded, but gaming has still continued and is even more prevalent in today's world than ever before.

What do you think about the emulation quality?
The emulation for the most part is pretty transparent, with some exceptions. There may be some slight variations that some people notice, but emulated games provide a great alternative to owning an original machine.

Game Room Wish List

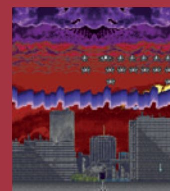
Ten arcade games that would be great for competitive play in Game Room

Robotron: 2084



28 years after its initial release and Eugene Jarvis's *Robotron: 2084* is still an utterly compelling blaster. It's already available on Live Arcade, but the challenge opportunities that Game Room offers means we'd still happily buy it again.

Space Invaders: Part IV



Space Invaders appearing on Game Room is as inevitable as night turning into day. We're more interested in the possibility of better sequels like this turning up. If Taito has any sense it would release a pack featuring all the arcade titles.

Bubble Bobble



Don't be fooled by its cute visuals and all that bubble blowing, because a devilishly delicious scoring system lies behind *Bubble Bobble*. Even today we're still learning new secrets, making it another essential addition to Microsoft's new arcade.

Ms Pac-Man



We don't really like the original *Pac-Man*, as it just feels a little long in the tooth. *Ms Pac-Man*, on the other hand, is a different proposition and we'd be happy to see it on Game Room, even if it has appeared on countless compilations.

RoadBlasters



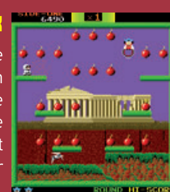
While we'd love *OutRun*, titles like *RoadBlasters* are far better suited to competitive play. Fast and frenetic and with just the right mix between racing and shooting, it would be a perfect addition and one we'd love to see.

Mr Do!



If Microsoft works out the legal mire that surrounds this game and releases it on Game Room, we'll change our names to Bill Gates Jr. It's an amazing game that was ahead of its time and features an intricate scoring system.

Bomb Jack



This wonderful little game has already appeared on Microsoft's Xbox, so we have high hopes that it will make the transition to Game Room. While it looks easy, you'll be chasing your friends' scores for ages.

Donkey Kong



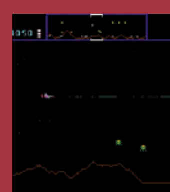
All right, this is never going to happen, but that doesn't mean we wouldn't love to see Shigeru Miyamoto's first game appear on the service. It's the defining high-score game and even had a film about it. High praise indeed.

Prehistoric Isle In 1930



This is more a guilty pleasure, as there are plenty of great shoot-'em-ups that would work. Not many of them allow you to blow the crap out of a huge Brontosaurus, though, and it would open the floodgates for more SNK games.

Defender



With its complicated button layout and hardcore action, *Defender* is the ultimate high-score blaster. Yes it's available on Xbox Live Arcade, but we can only imagine how much potential will be realised if it's released on Game Room.

Outlaw

- **Year Released:** 1978
- **Publisher:** Atari
- **Format:** Atari 2600

No, no, no. We don't want to see ports of arcade games in Game Room; we just want the originals. Considering the number of arcade ports on the 2600 we should be grateful we've received only two, but it's still two too many. Again, the lack of online support kills an extremely fun game.





RealSports Tennis

- **Year Released:** 1983
- **Publisher:** Atari
- **Format:** Atari 2600

We've found *RealSports Tennis* to be a guilty pleasure and have had quite a few games in the office. What a pity, then, that like every other two-player game available on Game Room, it's ruined by not being able to play it online. We're starting to see a pattern here…

Red Baron

- **Year Released:** 1980
- **Publisher:** Atari
- **Format:** Arcade

Excellent airborne take on *Battlezone* that has turned into one of Game Room's hidden gems. The graphics look wonderful, there's a decent scoring system, and it's gripping stuff. One of the best games currently on the service, especially when you're involved in a competition.



Road Fighter

- **Year Released:** 1984
- **Publisher:** Konami
- **Format:** Arcade



Once hailed by Stuart Campbell as the greatest racing game you've never heard of, Game Room now allows you to find out what all the fuss is about. Devilishly tricky to master – even watching the best high-score video doesn't give away many clues – it's a recklessly fast-paced experience that will push your nerves and reflexes to the limit.



Scramble

- **Year Released:** 1981
- **Publisher:** Konami
- **Format:** Arcade

This is why Game Room rocks. We've already bought the Xbox Live Arcade version, but *Scramble* works so well as a high-score experience that we happily repurchased it in order to take part in challenges. It's not quite as intense as *Super Cobra*, but it still presents a mighty challenge.

Shao-Lin's Road

classic games, but it's so much more than that. When Microsoft launched Game Room it stated that it wanted to bring back the experiences of the classic arcades, and, in our eyes, it's succeeded in that task admirably.

Hanging out with **Retro Gamer** readers, discussing hidden gems like *Red Baron* and *Shao-Lin's Road*, sending challenges, discussing tactics, and looking forward to future releases, this is effectively the exact same thing we were doing 25 years ago. Now, though, it comes with several far more exciting additions that not only enhance the competitive nature of what we used to experience in the Eighties but are sure to give high-score websites like Twin Galaxies potentially sleepless nights. Again, we were keen to interview Twin Galaxies and discover its thoughts on both Game Room and how it would plan to integrate Microsoft's system into its own authentication process, but it was unable to get back in time with responses before we went to press. Expect an update on our blog.

It's a pity that Twin Galaxies wasn't available, as Game Room will make deciding on authentic scores so much easier for it. Whenever you achieve a high score it's instantly uploaded to the online servers, where all friends and anyone not on your Friends List can view it. It's a fantastic concept that not only gives you incentive to continue getting higher and better scores, but actually proves straight away how good you are and proves to be an essential way of learning the best tricks and secrets of each game.

Challenges are another huge part of Game Room's appeal. Virtually every game on the service allows you to set challenges that can be sent out to your friends – up to seven at a time. It's simply a case of choosing a game, selecting the challenge terms – highest score, longest survival, amount of time – and choosing a taunt. The current high scorer gets to virtually taunt anyone else who is taking part in the challenge, and while the sight of your friend's virtual representation mooning you sounds absolutely ridiculous, it's amazing how much incentive the little bugger gives you to improve and totally annihilate your friend's precious score. Indeed, the high-score side of Game Room has been such a huge boost to us that we were keen to get Twin Galaxies' opinion on whether it would be accepting scores – it's currently impossible to mess with the Game Room servers, making cheating far less of an issue than it can be to the likes of MAME – and what it felt about Microsoft's attempt to resurrect something that it's been championing for so many years, but no one was available to comment.

To us, Game Room is all about perspective. At the time of writing it's been out for a week, and yes, there are niggles that can ruin the experience – many gamers are complaining about the servers not capturing their high scores, although it's something we've personally not experienced – but it's easy to forget that Game Room is still in its infancy. Microsoft is promising 1,000 games during the next three years and is intending to release seven new titles a week. The first new batch was delayed by several weeks, but they should be available by the time you read this, with many more on the way.

"Again, this is a new experience on Xbox Live, and we want to make sure, moving forward, that you get the best experience possible," said Pape when we asked him about the delay that could see interest fizzling due to the month wait without any new games. He's confident, however, that Game Room has the legs



Q&A Owen Rubin

Developer: *Major Havoc, Space Duel*

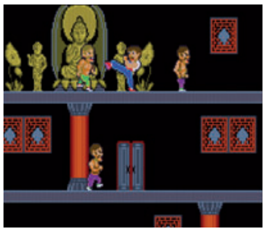
What do think about Game Room?
It's not a very good collection at the moment, but it does look like they've simply picked what they could license instead of what was most popular. Where is the first *Asteroids*? *Battle Zone*? And *Space Duel* was better than a number of these, if I do say so myself!

Why were the arcades of old so important?
[They] offered games that you couldn't play at home. Even when early home games came out, the experience wasn't the same. You could meet friends, make new friends, and have fun.

What's your favourite arcade game and why?
That's a hard question. I have to say *Computer Space*, because seeing that changed my whole world!

» Here's a look at the different graphic options that Krome has currently included. From left to right: Basic, Scanlines, Bilinear Filter, Bilinear Filter with Scanlines.

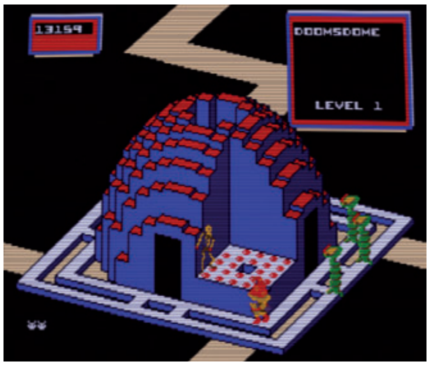






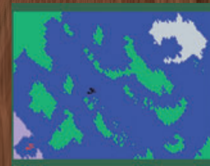






Game Room – The Line Up

Sea Battle
Year Released: 1980
Publisher: Mattel **Format:** Intellivision



Sea Battle is a great take on *Battleships* that works exceptionally well on the original console. Sadly an over-reliance on the virtual overlays and the inability to play online robs it greatly. Another great game that's currently not fulfilling its obvious potential.

Shao-Lin's Road
Year Released: 1985
Publisher: Konami **Format:** Arcade



With its simplistic chop-socky action and limited playing area you'd expect this 1985 offering from Konami to be a waste of time. Not so, for it hides a surprising amount of depth under its cartoony surface and has proven to be the perfect test for all sorts of challenges. A truly excellent release and one of Game Room's current highlights.

Space Armada
Year Released: 1979
Publisher: Mattel **Format:** Intellivision



Space Invaders clones are always handy, especially when the real deal isn't available, but this Intellivision version certainly isn't worth your time. Slow and clunky and featuring surprisingly stodgy controls, it's a big disappointment. Wait for the real deal.

Space Hawk
Year Released: 1981
Publisher: Mattel **Format:** Intellivision



The poor old Intellivision really is suffering from being translated across to Game Room, and *Space Hawk* is no exception. Fiddly controls and questionable collision detection ruin what could be an otherwise perfectly fun shooter. Another one to avoid, we're afraid.

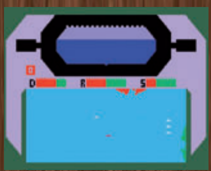
Star Raiders
Year Released: 1982
Publisher: Atari **Format:** Atari 2600



Groundbreaking for its time, *Star Raiders* remains an enjoyable shooter that actually works quite well on Game Room. It's not quite a frenetic as its arcade peers due to enemy attacks being not quite as relentless, but it's another solid Atari 2600 port that will no doubt please fans of the original cartridge.

STAR RAIDERS

Sub Hunt
> **Year Released:** 1981
> **Publisher:** Mattel > **Format:** Intellivision



Sub Hunt is a tricky prospect. While the game is a surprisingly strategic experience, its slow pace, reliance on the Intellivision's keypad and fiddly controls mean that it's just not suited to Microsoft's download service. Definitely one to avoid.

Super Cobra
> **Year Released:** 1981
> **Publisher:** Konami > **Format:** Arcade



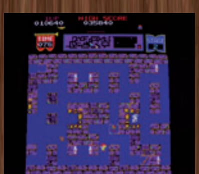
Wonderful follow-up to *Scramble* that offers more variation in its levels, and features a greater range of enemies. The result is a tough challenge, but it never feels unfair. Ignore its nigh-on identical look to *Scramble*, as they play significantly different to each other.

Tempest
> **Year Released:** 1980
> **Publisher:** Atari > **Format:** Arcade



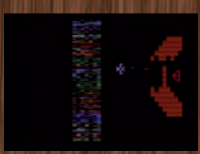
Ropey emulation means that the aspect ratio of *Tempest* is incorrect, meaning that certain stages don't fully show your ship on screen. It's certainly a pain, but *Tempest* remains perfectly playable and a hell of a lot of fun, even if the Xbox pad is no substitute for the original spinner that it used in the arcades.

Tutankham
> **Year Released:** 1982
> **Publisher:** Konami > **Format:** Arcade



Man, this game is tough. Adventuring, exploring and shooting all combine to create one of the most unique experiences currently available in Game Room. It's certainly a fun game, but the insane difficulty and sometimes questionable collision detection will put some gamers off.

Yar's Revenge
> **Year Released:** 1981
> **Publisher:** Atari > **Format:** Atari 2600



An astonishingly deep shoot-'em-up from Howard Scott Warshaw that gets better the longer you play it. You'll initially struggle to work your way around the complex mechanics, but once you grasp it, it becomes simply sensational. A perfect example of an Atari 2600 game that's perfectly suited to Game Room.



Q&A Howard Scott Warshaw
Developer:
Yar's Revenge, ET

> **What do you think about Game Room?**

I think that this is the natural evolution of bringing real life to the virtual experience. Now that social networking is growing in popularity, it desperately needs apps to maintain viability. Since people get e-xhausted from e-farming all day at work, they need a place to e-lax afterward. An e-cade is the perfect place to e-plenish one's e-sources and prepare for the next day's challenges.

> **How do you feel about your games being made available to a new generation of gamers?**

I love it! It's always wonderful to have my product discovered by another audience. My favourite aspect of this is when someone asks me if I've ever played *Yar's Revenge* because it's so cool. I also like teens that discover *Dark Side Of The Moon* and wonder if I've ever heard it – but you haven't really heard it unless you're stoned, dude.

> **Why do you think the arcades of old were so important?**

They provided a social forum for kids that weren't exclusively drug, gang, protest or vandalism-focused. Not that those elements were not present, but they weren't the primary thrust. This dynamic and competitive environment gave kids of all ages a project or goal to pursue, as well as acculturating them to technologies they needed to master. I actually think it was one of the healthiest popular teen social venues of the last 60 years.

> **What's your favourite arcade game?**

Defender! Without question or hesitation. It introduced the concept of a cohesive world requiring real-time monitoring and it let the player choose how they approached the game rather than dictate a single approach. It was one of the very first twitch games to offer true depth and virtually infinite game gratification. I still play *Defender*. I have spent many hours both playing and watching the game.



» [360] One of the joys of Game Room is discovering new games and sharing those experiences online with friends.

> (Game) Room for Improvement

As much as we love Game Room, there are a number of tweaks that will make it far more desirable to the hardcore gamer without alienating the casual audience. Additional screen displays and aspect ratios wouldn't go amiss. And why not have a word with Konami and get it to properly skin its cabinets so they're up to the same standard as the Atari coin-ops that are already available? Another nice touch would be full customisation for each game's controls. While there are several available, most people simply prefer to choose their own configurations. The above are only minor alterations, but they would definitely improve what's an already highly enjoyable experience.

"We picked the titles that best represent the golden era"

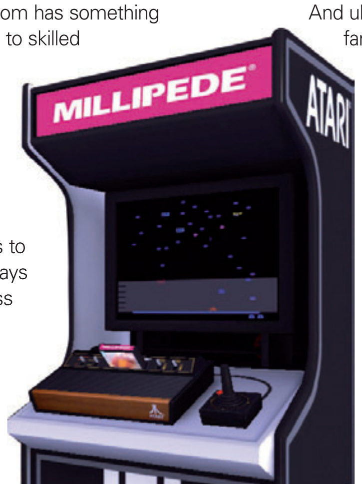
FRANK PAPE ON HOW MICROSOFT PICKED THE LAUNCH LINE-UP

to continue on the strength of its fairly significant launch line-up of titles.

"So far, community response has been overwhelmingly positive, and we are continually looking for feedback," he continues. "Game Room is about offering our community the chance to play iconic arcade and console games of the past few decades in exactly the same format as they were released. We worked with a number of developers and publishers to hand-pick the titles that we believe truly best represent that golden era of gaming, including the cabinets they were once presented in. The sheer variety of games will mean that Game Room has something for everyone, from new gamers to skilled pros. Plus, with more games released every week, players will be spoilt for choice."

And that's the real beauty of Game Room: it's right at the beginning of its life and for all the things people like to say about Microsoft, when it comes to the Xbox Live community it always listens. We currently have access to 30 games, ranging from the excellent like *Crystal Castles*, *Centipede*, *Yar's Revenge*, *Scramble* and *Shao-Lin's Road*, to the mediocre such as *Football* and *Mountain Madness Skiing*, to titles like *Combat* and *Armor Battle* that could be amazing if they actually featured online multiplayer support. There are another 970 games on the way, and while there's no denying the expense – the first 30 games will cost you roughly £60 – no one is expecting you to buy every single one. Game Room is all about offering choice to the consumer, just like the original arcades did. It's all about allowing you to compete against and hang out with your friends, just like the original arcades did.

And ultimately it's all about playing a range of fantastic arcade games, just like the original arcades were. Game Room offers something that no other compilation, no matter how well-emulated – nor even MAME, for that matter – has ever offered: namely the opportunity to own your own affordable arcade and to compete against friends. And as the range of arcade machines and consoles continues to grow, that virtual arcade is just going to get better and better and better. Digital dreams indeed.



BOSS/RUSH

WHERE WE SQUARE OFF AGAINST THAT END-OF-LEVEL BADDIE FROM YESTERYEAR…

ZOMBIE PIRATE LECHUCK

My name is Guybrush Threepwood, and I'm a mighty pirate. I'd like to tell you about the second time I bested the Pirate LeChuck. The first time I sent him in his ghostly form to hell, the only part of him left on this earth was his wiggling crusty beard, which I had no hesitation in showing around as proof of my epic victory. That turned out to be a mistake.

The beard was stolen by a scoundrel by the name of Largo LaGrande, a crony of the undead pirate, who then used it to resurrect my most hated of enemies, the now-zombie Pirate LeChuck, who hounded me while I was on my mighty quest to find the lost pirate treasure of 'Big Whoop'.

Things eventually came to a head in his horrifically huge stony fortress after he kidnapped the only man, Wally, who could help me piece the treasure map together. I won't bore you with the tale of how I rescued my friend, escaped from certain doom, blew up the fortress, found the treasure and got the girl, but suffice to say that it was the most manly thing you could possibly hear and your heart would explode with envy at the tale, though I will tell you of how I faced down my nemesis for the second time.

Trapped together underground, he had the drop on me. He had somehow crafted his own voodoo doll of my likeness, which he stabbed each time he faced me to cause me unbearable pain and even blink me from existence into a hell of his making. Fortunately for me, he used shoddy mojo and I merely blinked to another site in the caves, where he would look for me again. Each time he found me he would stab the doll, giving me barely a moment to breathe nor think nor act before the hunt began again.

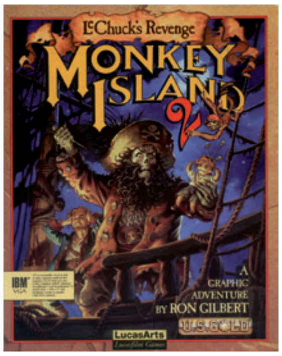
Those who know me by now know that I am not without resource nor courage – nor even a rubber chicken with a pulley in the middle in this situation – and so using only what I could find, I turned the tables on the foul fiend to create my own voodoo doll. Thanks to my extensive knowledge of the occult, I knew how to create an effigy and place the curse. I would need four items from the victim-to-be: Something of the Head, Something of the Thread, Something of the Body, and Something of the Dead.

With hair snatched from his ghostly beard; a skull from his ancestor, handily found in the caves; his underwear, which I swiped while he wasn't looking – truly not a job for the timid – and even a little bit of snot, I cunningly crafted the mystical juju into a doll to be reckoned with.

We saw on that day which of us had the mightier mojo. Man against zombie, good versus evil and voodoo doll against voodoo doll. As is the way of these tales, I got the drop on him and was the fastest. I stabbed it with a needle, making him writhe in agony; I stretched it in horrific ways, distending his body; and just for giggles, I pulled off a leg. Yes, my loyal crew, we saw who was standing and who was lying on the floor, missing a leg. What sort of a pirate has only one leg?

Did I not mention that I am a mighty pirate?

> **"I turned the tables on the foul fiend to create my own voodoo doll"**





GAME INFO

- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** AMIGA
- » **RELEASED:** 1991
- » **PUBLISHER:** LUCASARTS
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE





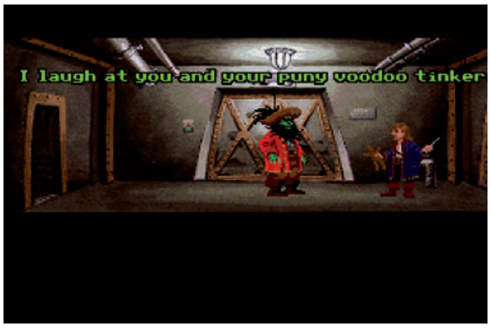
» [Amiga] Yes. Do you have ANY moisturising regime?



» [Amiga] Behold the power of EVIL voodoo!



» [Amiga] The things we do to save the world…



» [Amiga] Well, I laugh at your awful dress sense, so there!



It's a jungle out there.
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Your unmissable guide to iPad, iPhone and iPod games
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TURTLE VILLAGE

Axes *to* Grind

The legend of Golden Axe



When Sega decided to create more mature videogames to distance itself from Nintendo, Golden Axe became a key title in its North American success story. Stuart Hunt investigates the history of the Mega Drive's first must-own videogame



It was common in the Eighties for Japanese developers to look to Western film and television for themes to set their videogames to, and Sega became the undisputed world champion of this approach to game design.

Throughout the Eighties Sega could be seen capitalising on the ninja craze that swept the US with *Shinobi*, harnessing the slapstick cheeriness from *The Cannonball Run* in *OutRun*, borrowing the futuristic chopper from *Airwolf* in *Thunder Blade*, taking inspiration from Michael Jackson's *Thriller* video for *Altered Beast*, and lifting elements from *Conan The Barbarian* and *Jason And The Argonauts* for its hack-and-slash arcade smash, *Golden Axe*. In fact, it's possible that, had unspooling cassette tapes over the heads of sleeping dogs become trendy in America in the Eighties, Sega of Japan would have been scratching its head, trying to work out how to adapt the pastime into a three-button arcade game, but it was an approach that served it well. Knowing that it was struggling against Nintendo in Japan, Sega realised that its best chance of success was to pander more to Western gamers and to leave the cutesy likes of *Alex Kidd* behind.

The creation of Makoto Uchida, *Golden Axe* was the designer's arcade follow-up to his bestial beat-'em-up *Altered Beast*. It's believed that Uchida's initial vision for his next project was to deviate from the genre entirely with an epic RPG instead, but Sega had other plans. Pleased by *Altered Beast*'s success, it was keen for Uchida and his small team to work on delivering another profitable arcade brawler instead.

Altered Beast's big draw at the time was, of course, its main hero: a warrior brought back from the dead who could transform into a bestiary of creatures – something pretty unique and empowering back then. Today, however, the mechanic can be seen as a clever device to hide some pretty pedestrian level design. It seems that Uchida's tactic was to hook users in through

History of the Golden Axe

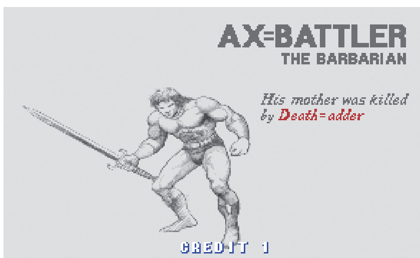
It took a few games for Sega to finally come up with a back story for the titular gold weapon and why everyone was so desperate to get their hands on it. *Golden Axe Warrior* on the Master System was the first game to really flesh out its history, explaining that the weapon was a powerful gift from the spirit of Thor to a sect of elders, to protect them and their land from evil. A nefarious band of giants start a great war with the elders but are beaten by a mysterious warrior wielding the Golden Axe. Death Adder, and presumably the other oversized bosses that appear throughout the games of the series, are basically descendents of these giants and seek out the Golden Axe to use its power to conquer the world. In *Golden Axe: The Duel*, the game states that the weapon was used by Gilius to slay Death Adder and has grown so much in power that it now possesses wish-granting properties to whomever is deemed worthy of wielding it. Interestingly, the weapon plays the role of final boss in the game, taking the bodily form of a gold knight that emerges from the axe.

finding out which manimal their disproportionate hero would transform into next rather than with varied level design and variety. With *Golden Axe*, Uchida took the themes of *Altered Beast* but applied it to a much better game; one that brought interesting ideas to the genre and some wonderfully imaginative level design.

Released in 1989 and chugging from Sega's System 16 arcade hardware, *Golden Axe* immediately stood out thanks to its unique fantasy setting, adult themes and unflinching violence. The small team that worked on the game consisted of two artists, two programmers, one sound person (Tohru Nakabayashi) and Uchida as project lead, and the game was said to have taken the team just six months to complete.

At the time, *Golden Axe* was famous for being one of the earliest side-scrolling fighting games to glue weapons into the hands of its protagonists and feature magic attacks, which could be powered up through banking magic pots in the game to dazzling effect. It was also notable for being one of the first arcade fighters to give players a choice in the type of hero they wished to be, with three characters for selection that demonstrated individual, albeit subtle, combat traits in the game. Players could choose between the broadsword-wielding barbarian, Ax Battler, who possessed good strength, reflexes and magic attacks; the Amazonian Tyris Flare, who lacks strength but has powerful magic and good speed and reach thanks to her long sword; and Gilius Thunderhead the dwarf, the most powerful of the heroes but the weakest magic user in the game. *Golden Axe* also featured memorable enemies, many of which dwarfed the game's heroes and, as a nice presentational touch, fallen enemies would turn to stone and remain where they fell rather than flash and disappear.

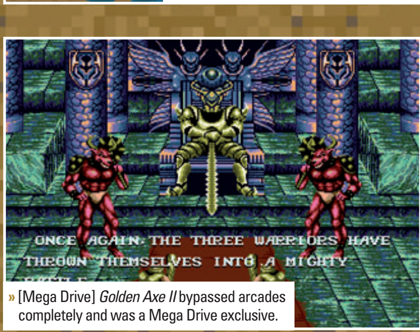
> "Golden Axe immediately stood out thanks to its unique fantasy setting, adult themes and unflinching violence"



» [Arcade] The arcade game offers a no-frills explanation to the characters' personal motives for wanting to stop Death Adder.



» [Arcade] *Golden Axe* was one of the first beat-'em-ups to feature diverse heroes.



» [Mega Drive] *Golden Axe II* bypassed arcades completely and was a Mega Drive exclusive.

Another memorable aspect of *Golden Axe*'s gameplay was the fact that players could ride animal steeds to inflict damage on their enemies. Known as Bizarrians, these creatures were essentially a novel mechanic to power up your character, but brought with them their own element of risk: your enemies could also use them against you. Incidentally, the first Bizzarian that the player encounters, the pinkish bird-like creature Chicken Leg, debuted in *Altered Beast*. He appeared on the game's title screen and as an enemy in the second stage of the game, hinting, perhaps, that it was Uchida's intention to have the worlds of *Altered Beast* and *Golden Axe* subtly linked in some way, although, to the best of our knowledge, there has never been any conclusive evidence of this.

The setting of *Golden Axe* was the medieval fantasy land of Yuria, and was said to be inspired by Uchida's love for the *Conan* films. The story told the tale of three heroes who are all seeking vengeance against an evil giant named Death Adder. The nefarious tyrant has stolen a mythical weapon named the Golden Axe, murdered family members of our heroes, and is threatening to kill the king and his daughter unless the people of Yuria accept him as their new ruler. Unnecessarily confusing the tale is Gilius's battle axe. Coloured an obvious hue of bright gold, it gave the impression that he was in possession of the Golden Axe weapon, which isn't the case. To avoid confusion, perhaps this is why, for the Mega Drive conversion Sega switched the colour to silver instead, although it remains gold in the Amiga version.

With multiple heroes, various spell attacks and animal steeds, it's understandable that something in *Golden Axe* had to give way to all that variety. And while the game's levels certainly stood out for being wonderfully imaginative – the most memorable were the stages Turtle Village and the Fiend's Path, which were set on the back of a giant turtle and eagle respectively – they were incredibly short and dressed with a paltry number of enemy characters. The short and sweet nature of *Golden Axe*, however, became key to its overall success in arcades. It's since been revealed that



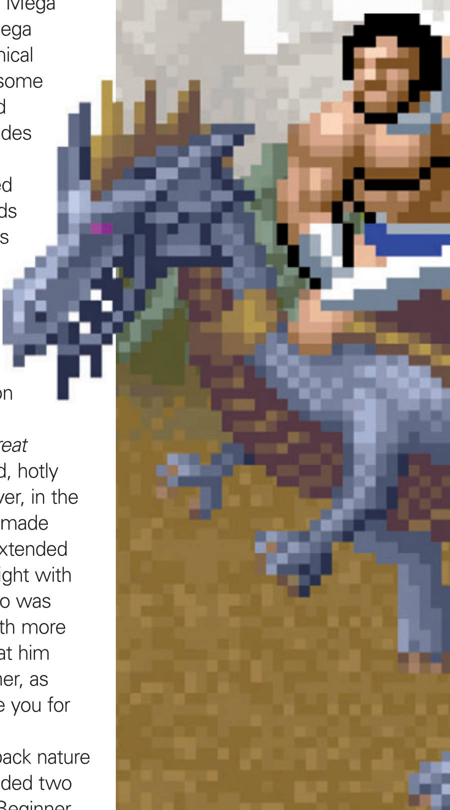
Uchida's approach to its design was to simply map the game out in three-minute increments, with the thinking that a credit would usually translate to three minutes of play for the gamer. Cleverly, he and his team tried to pack as much as they could into these segments to encourage gamers to keep playing and see what was coming next in the game. And the approach worked, as *Golden Axe* fast became a smash hit in arcades and was rapidly ported to nearly every console and computer under the sun.

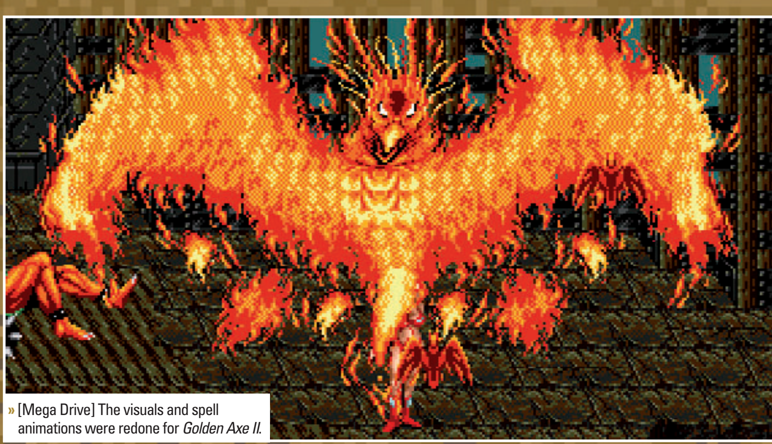


» [Mega Drive] *Golden Axe III* introduced new characters and featured branching stages.

All home conversions of *Golden Axe* were basically pared-down versions of the arcade game, with the most popular being the Mega Drive port. Differences between the Mega Drive and arcade versions include graphical detail and colour being slightly muted, some enemies missing attacks, and the blood and violence being censored. This includes the famous opening scene where our heroes witness an injured soldier named Alex being mercilessly killed at the hands of one of Adder's men – this scene was only retained in the Amiga port – and Adder's gory death sequence where he is killed by his own axe, creating a gruesome geyser of blood. The Mega Drive version also tweaked the game's ending. In the original conclusion our heroes defeat Death Adder, and his remaining soldiers jump out of a '*Great Axe*' arcade machine and into our world, hotly followed by Ax, Tyris and Gilius. However, in the Mega Drive version, Death Adder was made the penultimate boss, with the game extended by two stages that ended with a final fight with a new enemy called Death Bringer, who was basically just a green-skinned Adder with more powerful spell attacks. When you defeat him there's also no fourth-wall-breaking either, as instead the king and his daughter praise you for your gallant efforts.

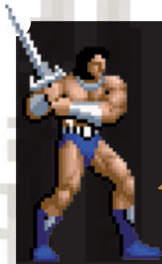
Perhaps to compensate for the cut-back nature of the Mega Drive conversion, Sega added two additional game modes. The first was Beginner mode, and gave newcomers to the game the





» [Mega Drive] The visuals and spell animations were redone for *Golden Axe II*.

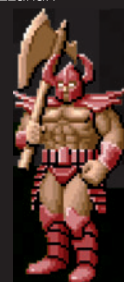
Golden Axe A-Z



Ax Battler is the name of *Golden Axe*'s recurring barbarian-style hero.

Bizzarians is the official name given to the animal steeds that can be ridden in the game.

Chicken Leg is the most famous of the Bizzarian creatures in the series, and debuted in *Altered Beast*.



Death Adder is the main antagonist in the series, and continually seeks out the Golden Axe for evil intent.

Extending the adventure for Mega Drive owners, Sega added two more stages to the game.

Firewood is the setting for the *Golden Axe* spin-off games, *Golden Axe Warrior* and *Ax Battler: A Legend Of Golden Axe*.

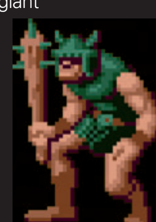
Golden Axe is the mythical weapon that plays the object of everyone's desire in the games.



Heninger is the name given to the standard bald moustachioed enemies in the original game.

Impish elves appear throughout the series and release health and magic pots if kicked.

Jamm is a female fighter from *Golden Axe: The Duel*. She's an orphan and fights using giant animal claws fastened to her hands.



Kain Grinder is the name of the Ax-Battler-style hero in *Golden Axe III*.

Longmoan is the name of the standard enemies in the first *Golden Axe*.

Multiplayer quickly became a big draw of *Golden Axe* in arcades.

Naofumi Hataya wrote the score to *Golden Axe II*, and went on to compose music for *Sonic CD* and *NiGHTS*.

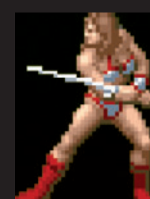
Oversized enemies are a staple of the *Golden Axe* series, and it's later revealed that Death Adder is a descendent of an evil band of giants.

Panchos is a character from *Golden Axe: The Duel*. He's the son of an inventor and fights using bombs and a morningstar.

Quill is the device used to plot your progress through the land of Yuri in *Golden Axe*.

***R**evenge Of Death Adder* was the arcade sequel to *Golden Axe* and is widely regarded as the pinnacle of the series.

Sega's System 16 arcade hardware was used to create the original *Golden Axe*.



Tyris Flare is the female protagonist in the first and last *Golden Axe* games. She's an Amazon with powerful fire magic.

Uchida (Mokato) was the man responsible for bringing *Golden Axe* to life. The game was believed to be inspired by his love of the *Conan* films.

Vengeance is what the original three heroes seek after Death Adder murders members of their family.

Weapons and magic played a big part in *Golden Axe*'s success.

X-rated action featured heavily in the arcade version of *Golden Axe*. This was toned down in the home conversions.

Yuria is the setting for the original *Golden Axe*.

***Z**elda*-clone is a term often used to explain the look and gameplay of *Golden Axe Warrior*.

The legend of Golden Axe



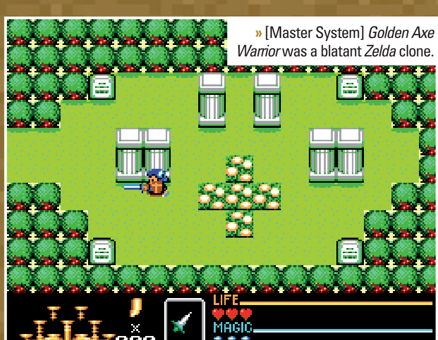
» [Mega Drive] Ax Battler throws a foe into his powerful car wash spell.

opportunity to practise their skills in a three-stage version of the game, which ended with a fight against an easier version of Death Adder. The second mode was Duel, which saw players battling against waves of differing enemies – an odd choice considering that the game didn't have many to draw from – and, if played by two people, transformed into a pretty basic one-on-one fighter between the three main characters. Perhaps the most bizarre port of *Golden Axe* was the version that found its way onto the Sega Master System. Not only did it feature lacklustre visuals, animation and a horrendously remixed version of Tohru Nakabayashi's resplendent *Conan*-esque score, but it was also missing co-op and Tyris and Gilius, with players forced to play as Ax Battler – dubbed Tarik in this version, for reasons never explained – who now had the choice of using the magic attacks of his absent comrades.

Given the popularity of *Golden Axe* both in arcades and on the Mega Drive, it was predictable that Sega would want to release a sequel to the game, and two years later, in 1991, *Golden Axe II* was released. Sidestepping arcades entirely, the game was a Mega Drive exclusive, which was common practice for Sega sequels at the time – it did the same thing with the sequels to *Space Harrier* and *Shinobi*. Set a few years after the first *Golden Axe*, the console sequel followed a familiar plot: a new evil entity named Dark Guld has usurped the town, and it falls to you to stop him. The game saw the three original heroes return, but all with redrawn sprites and new visual representations of their magic attacks, the power of which was now determined by how long you held down the spell button, although you could change this back to the classic method in the option menu. But while the visuals looked crisper and cleaner, the level design really wasn't a patch on the original game, with stages feeling a tad derivative and predictable, and none of the previous game's gameplay criticisms being addressed. The levels were still shorter than a cadaver's libido, and there remained a paltry number of enemies for our heroes to fight. *Golden Axe II* was also made easier than the original by the fact that players could now throw enemies into each other, which made fighting groups easier to juggle, and could set the length of their health bar as well as the difficulty of the game, although you couldn't fully complete the game on the easiest setting. Where the sequel does excel, though, is the music. While a little hit and miss at points, Naofumi Hataya's score is an audio treat that captured the epic tunes of the original game but had a far more contemporary sound that really hasn't aged at all.

1991 was a busy year for the *Golden Axe* franchise. As well as *Golden Axe II*, Sega released two spin-off games in the series: *Golden Axe Warrior* for the Sega Master System and *Ax Battler: A Legend Of Golden Axe* for the company's Game Gear portable. Both saw a dramatic change to the series' traditional gameplay. In the case of *Golden Axe Warrior*, one of the twilight SMS releases from Sega, the game was a blatant *Zelda* clone, featuring similar graphics, a top-down viewpoint, and gameplay and level arrangements. It even had a battery save option, which was practically unheard of in SMS games at the time. But as you would expect when lifting much of its design from *Zelda*, the game proved to be an enjoyable RPG and was widely well-received by fans.

For the Game Gear offering, Sega simply smashed together the RPG elements of *Golden*



» [Master System] *Golden Axe Warrior* was a blatant *Zelda* clone.

Sega Ages

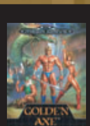


In 2003 Sega, with help from D3 Publisher, decided to give many of its old franchises a fresh lick of paint by re-imagining them with all-new 3D graphics and features. The games were released for the PlayStation 2 in Japan under the budget label *Sega Ages 2500* – so-named because they retailed for 2,500 yen each – and *Golden Axe* was one of the first games to undergo a nip and tuck. Sadly, it really didn't benefit from the surgery. The *Sega Ages* rendition of *Golden Axe* somehow managed to look worse than *Golden Axe III* – and that's saying something. With horribly bland environments, garish character models and duff animation, it ranks as possibly the worst *Golden Axe* game there is. New features added included larger levels; an intro explaining the origin of the Golden Axe, using information that was previously explained in the introduction to *Golden Axe Warrior*; terrible throwaway in-game cut-scenes; and a stupid explosion animation every time you hit an enemy, obscuring your view of the combat. It fails in every respect apart from the orchestral score, which is so bloody good that it's almost worth buying the game for alone.



Timeline

Golden Axe



Year released: 1989
Format: Arcade, various ports

The evil Death Adder has conquered the land of Yuria using a powerful weapon known as the Golden Axe. Three heroes, who have each had family members murdered by the tyrant, embark on a quest to retrieve the weapon, free the land, and seek vengeance for their lost loved ones.

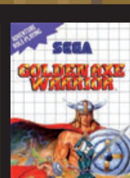
Golden Axe II



Year released: 1991
Format: Mega Drive

Set a few years after the first game, a new tyrant named Dark Guld has stolen the Golden Axe and is using it to terrorise the land. The three original heroes join forces to put a stop to Guld, retrieve the Golden Axe, and restore peace once again.

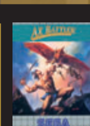
Golden Axe Warrior



Year released: 1991
Format: SMS

The land of Firewood is left decimated by the ruthless giant Death Adder after a devious aide to the king sells him nine gems that protect the land. It falls to Ax Battler to retrieve the gems and find the Golden Axe to defeat Adder.

Ax Battler: A Legend Of Golden Axe



Year released: 1991
Format: Game Gear

The Golden Axe has been stolen once again by Death Adder's evil army, this time from the castle where it was being safeguarded. The king summons Ax Battler to scour the land to retrieve it. According to this game's box art, this adventure is also set in Firewood.

Axe Warrior with typical *Golden Axe* gameplay. Players once again assumed the role of Ax Battler and embarked on a top-down adventure to retrieve the Golden Axe, but switched to a side-on *Rygar*-style perspective for combat and platform sections.

Given the huge success of the original *Golden Axe* in arcades, and the renaissance period that the arcade market was seeing as it entered the Nineties, it was little surprise that Sega would decide to release a *Golden Axe* sequel in arcades. However, with the likes of Capcom's *Final Fight* and Konami's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* making the original game look dated, Sega knew that it had to produce something pretty special to ensure that the series could compete. Sega looked to its System 32 arcade hardware for the answer and released *Golden Axe: The Revenge Of Death Adder* in 1992, a game that many fans would consider the best instalment in the series.

The switch in hardware not only gave Sega the opportunity to fully overhaul the look of *Golden Axe* but also improve elements of its gameplay too. As a result, *Revenge* boasted a wider variety of enemies to fight and its levels featured multiple routes to offer a little more replay value to the game. It also benefited from scaling effects to allow scrolling into the screen, and the game's stages featured plenty of peripheral action going on in the background,

> "It's believed that Uchida's initial vision for Golden Axe was to deviate from the genre entirely"

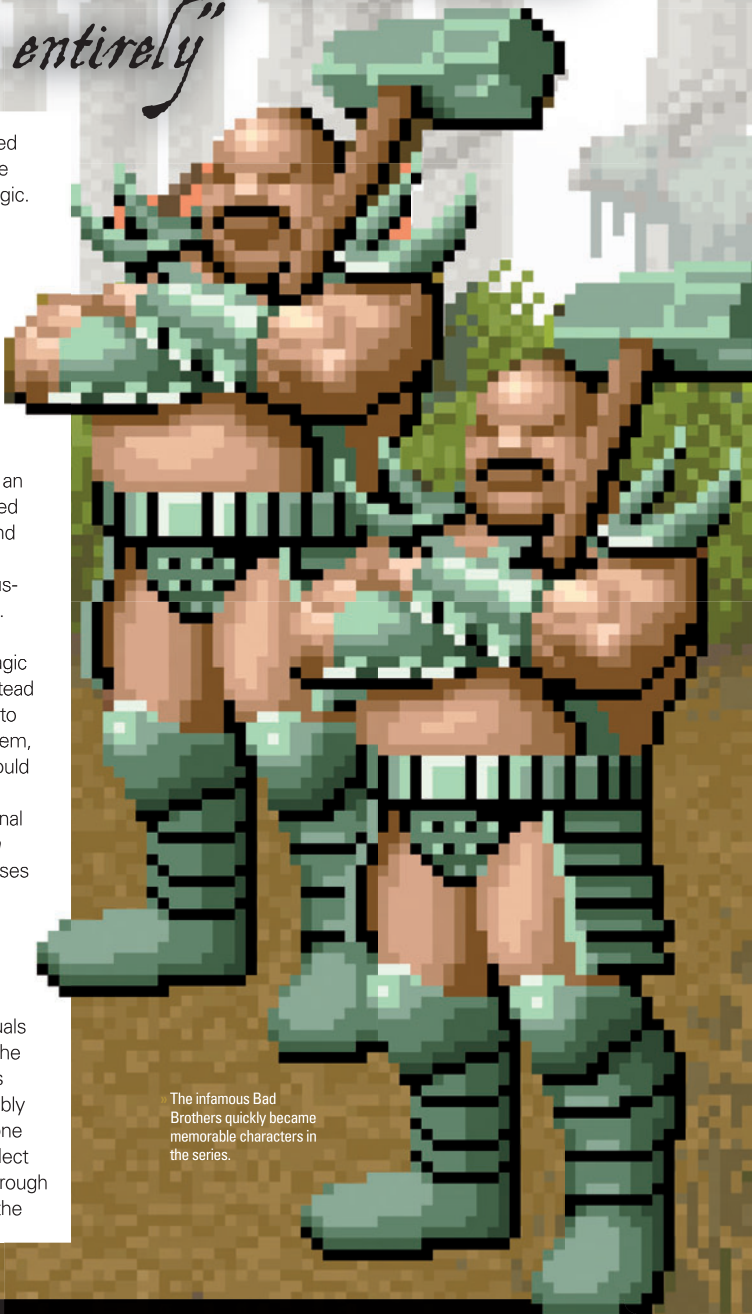
such as enslaved villagers that could be saved and barrels and treasure chests that could be smashed open to glean extra health and magic. On top of all this, players could use weapon emplacements such as catapults and arrow launchers, and these could even be fitted to Bizzarians, adding even more variety to the already-expanded action.

Perhaps the only sour note is that Gilius is the only returning character from the original line-up, and even he isn't controllable: he sits on the back of a giant named Goah. The new heroes joining Gilius and Goah on the mission were Stern Blade, an Ax Battler-style hero; a female centaur named Dora, who was the replacement for Tyris; and Trix, a small impish character armed with a pitchfork who played the role of a small Gilius-type character, although lacking his strength. The final tweak that Sega made was to the magic system. Rather than have variable magic types for each hero, each character was instead given one spell attack, and to actuate it had to bank a magic quota that was individual to them, essentially meaning that some characters could access magic attacks faster than others.

A year later, in 1993, Sega released the final *Golden Axe* title for the Mega Drive: *Golden Axe III*. Given how close together their releases fell, many fans hoped that the game would be a pared-down port of *Revenge*, but as it turned out it was actually a strange mixture of that game and past *Golden Axe* Mega Drive titles. Retaining the graphical style of *Golden Axe* and *Golden Axe II*, but with visuals that were notably less vibrant and defined, the game borrowed many of the good elements that Sega introduced in *Revenge*, most notably the branching stages, though here it was done a bit better – at points you actually got to select different stages as well as different paths through a level. Like *Revenge*, it also did away with the



» [Game Gear] Ax Battler was the first portable *Golden Axe* title to find release.



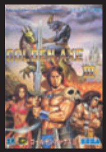
» The infamous Bad Brothers quickly became memorable characters in the series.



Golden Axe: The Revenge Of Death Adder

Year released: 1992
Format: Arcade

Death Adder has risen from the dead and with his evil army is spreading terror across the land. Gilius Thunderhead brings together four new heroes to fight their way to Adder's citadel and put an end to the evil oppressor once and for all.



Golden Axe III

Year released: 1993
Format: Mega Drive (Japan)

The Golden Axe is stolen from Gilius by a new enemy led by Damud Hellbringer. Using the power of the axe, he has put a curse on the warriors of the land. Four, however, have the curse lifted – presumably by Gilius – and set out to recover the weapon from Hellbringer.



Golden Axe: The Duel

Year released: 1994
Format: Arcade, Saturn

A 2D one-on-one fighter set a few years after the events of *The Revenge Of Death Adder*, with many of its characters being descendants of past protagonists. Each character is brought together to seek possession of the Golden Axe, which is personified as the game's final boss.



Golden Axe: Beast Rider

Year released: 2008
Format: Xbox 360, PS3

A prequel to the original, *Beast Rider* saw players assume the role of a young Tyris Flare as she rushes to save the people of Axir by stopping Death Adder from possessing the power of the great dragon Titan.

Map of Yuria

One of the best elements of Golden Axe was its memorable and imaginative level design. We take a trip through the fantasy land of Yuria to remind ourselves why it was so impressive back then

Stage 1: Village Outskirts

The game starts with our heroes stopped by Alex, an injured soldier who explains that Death Adder is holding the king and his daughter hostage. Alex is then killed by one of Adder's men, leaving us to stop the evil plan. It isn't long before we encounter our first Bizzarian, Chicken Leg, and use his tail attack to defeat the imposing Bad Brothers, a pair of smiling giants armed with nasty-looking mallets.



Stage 2: Turtle Village



Though you don't really get to appreciate it until the subsequent level, this entire stage is set on the back of a giant turtle. As you come up against a lone Longmoan, you may twig the subtle detail that the first platform you jump on resembles a turtle shell – this is far less obvious in the home conversions. This very short stage finishes with a fight in the village against a gang of Amazons and skeletons.

Stage 3: The Mainland Coast

The turtle takes our heroes south across the sea and drops them off at the mainland coast. After a brief battle against Adder's forces on the turtle's neck and head, the battle continues to a bar called The Beer Golden Sega, which is a bit of a mouthful. Here you must battle a giant knight armed with a broadsword and shield. Annoyingly, he is also accompanied by some of his drinking buddies.



Stage 4: Fiend's Path

With the route blocked by Adder's men, the trio are forced to brave the Fiend's Path in order to reach Adder's Castle. This level begins in an eerie, uninhabited village and finishes on a long bridge decorated with plumes of feathers. As the sky turns red, skeletons start rising from the ground and are joined by Dark Heningers and Dark Longmoans. If you have any magic then now is a pretty good time to use it.



Stage 5: Death Adder's Castle



Our heroes learn that the Fiend's Path was a great eagle, which takes them to the castle. After a fight with some skeletons, you leg it to the entrance, where you fight two knights. Once they're defeated, you fight Death Adder in the form of a nest of snakes before he transforms into his true shape: an axe-wielding giant knight in red underpants. Charm him with a nice magic trick.

classic cast of heroes. Instead there was an Ax Battler-type barbarian called Kain Grinder, a Tyris equivalent named Sarah Barn, a power character named Braoude Cragger, and a cool *Altered Beast*-style man-panther named Chronos 'Evil' Lait. The game's story explained that the quartet was pulled together by Gilius, who isn't playable but does appear in the game, to help retrieve the Golden Axe after it's stolen from him by a new enemy named Damud Hellbringer.

Golden Axe III is noteworthy for finally tweaking the combat mechanics, as characters now had many more offensive moves at their disposal thanks to simultaneous D-pad inputs actuating different attacks. There's even a bit of *Revenge*-style background interactivity, too, with the heroes freeing enslaved villagers. Where *Golden Axe III* suffers in comparison to the series' better games, though, is ropey visuals, poor animation, and maddening collision detection. It also has some horrendously bad magic effects that seemed hurriedly knocked together – Chronos's spell attack, for instance, simply turns the screen a horrible shade of white noise. Strangely, *Golden Axe III* wasn't released outside Japan at the time of its original release, with some citing Sega's disappointment with the quality of the game as the reason. For a time the game was available to download from the Sega Channel in North America, however, and more recently it was included in the *Sega Ultimate Mega Drive Collection* for the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360, alongside *Golden Axe*, *Golden Axe II* and *Golden Axe Warrior*.

The next *Golden Axe* game released saw the biggest change in the franchise to date. Running from Sega's Titan ST-V board, *Golden Axe: The Duel* (1994) was another Japan-only arcade release, but one that did find a home conversion courtesy of the Sega Saturn. *Golden Axe: The Duel* was one-on-one weapon-based fighter set in the *Golden Axe* universe. It was clear that Sega was trying to capitalise on the popularity of the beat-'em-up genre at the time with the game, but its efforts fell short of giving gamers the same thrills and spills as contemporary offerings from Capcom and SNK. The game was well-presented, though, with nicely drawn character sprites and some nifty scaling effects that zoomed in and out of the action, giving it a look not too dissimilar to SNK's *Samurai Shodown* games. Oddly, Sega was once again unwilling to use the original cast of characters in the game, and instead opted to make many of the game's combatants young descendents of those legendary heroes. The character Kain Blade, for instance, is a relation of Stern Blade, while Milan Flare is a progeny of Tyris. Gilius's great grandson, Gilius Rockhead, also makes an appearance in the game. It did at least try to admirably shoehorn *Golden Axe* elements into its gameplay, including the use of magic playing a part in special attacks and exquisite interactive backgrounds that included thieves who could be hit to release magic potions, and green dwarves that would drop health-replenishing meat. Marring many fans' opinion of the game, though, was the fact that Sega decided to release *The Duel* rather than the more popular *The Revenge Of Death Adder* arcade game on the Saturn. Perhaps this was down to the misguided belief that *Revenge* was too short and didn't offer console gamers enough value.

It was just over a decade later, in 2006, when Sega announced to attendees at that year's E3 that it would be rebooting the *Golden Axe* franchise on modern consoles. Farming the job out to developer Secret Level, developer of the atrociously bad *Final Fight: Streetwise*, the result was *Golden Axe: Beast Rider* (2008), a game that pulled the series kicking and screaming into a predictable *Devil May Cry*-style hack-and-slash 3D action game.

Entirely missing the point of what *Golden Axe* was all about, players could only assume the role of Tyris Flare in the game, with both Gilius and Ax Battler, who's oddly named Tarik again, given just bit-parts in the story. As its title suggests, the gameplay was heavily geared towards riding the Bizzarian creatures, and this was probably a purposeful bid to make the game feel more *Golden Axe*-like, as stripping that element away leaves you with a pretty bland hack-and-slash game. Given the unfavourable reception that *Beast Rider* received, it seems very unlikely that Sega will continue on with its plans to reboot the *Golden Axe* series, despite the game's ending hinting at a sequel.

Looking back on the series, perhaps no game really typifies Sega better than the original *Golden Axe*. As well as roughly marking the point in the sand where the company looked to create more mature videogames to help differentiate itself from the family-friendly competition and court a new audience, it is also an emblematic Sega game in many respects: it offered short-term thrills, memorable heroes and was wonderfully presented, showing Sega doing what it does best, but it wasn't perfect by any stretch. It also birthed a spotted history of games, ranging from the great to the truly awful, which is an affliction that unfortunately plagues even the most revered Sega franchises. Even so, its flaws are easily forgiven because it was such a great product of its time.





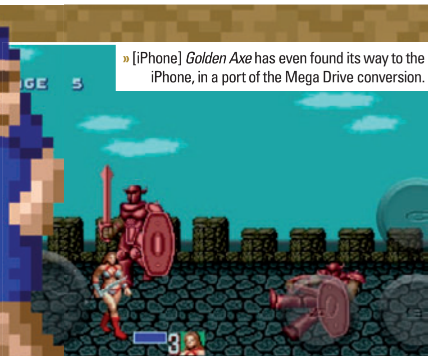
» [Xbox 360] Sega looked to reboot the franchise with *Beast Rider* in 2008.



» [Arcade] *Revenge* was a sublime sequel and, as such, remains the best game in the series for many fans.





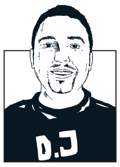


» [iPhone] *Golden Axe* has even found its way to the iPhone, in a port of the Mega Drive conversion.

Stampede

HIGH SCORES AND SADDLE SORES

» RETROREVIVAL



» ATARI 2600
» ACTIVISION
» 1981

If there's one Activision title that never quite appears to get the love it so obviously deserves, then it's the wonderful *Stampede*. Based on the simplest of concepts – herd up cattle as your mounted cowboy rides towards them – it remains a truly superb score attack game that, as with many early Activision titles, places gameplay above everything else.

Although that's not to say *Stampede* is an ugly game; far from it. With its super-smooth scrolling, delightful animation and crisp, chunky sprites, seeing *Stampede* in motion is a delight. While its audio isn't quite up to the same high standards, it's a typically slick effort from Activision that still looks great. It remains testament to just how much talent was at Activision and is a great example of the infamous 'Venetian Blinds' technique created by Bob Whitehead.

While the visuals are extremely impressive, it's the gameplay where *Stampede* truly shines – it's so addictive I've had to resort to playing it on the PSP's *Activision Hits Remixed* whenever I get a spare five minutes. A variety of different cows (or dogies as they're referred to in the game) move across the screen, and it's down to your cowpoke to lasso them up as quickly as possible. While you can only move up and down, it is possible to nudge cows that stray too close to you, giving you the few extra precious seconds needed to snag them.

Things are made harder by the addition of the Black Angus, a 100-point beast that steadfastly refuses to move, and bleached skulls that need to be avoided at all costs (and annoyingly cause your horse to rear, which can in turn cause cattle to stray). Let three dogies sneak past you and it's game over. Fortunately, if you score enough points it's possible to gain an extra stray allowance (up to nine).

With eight difficulty levels to contend with that greatly affect the AI of the cattle, *Stampede* is an easy game to get into, but a tough one to actually master. There's no doubting its addictive qualities, however, and it's a challenge that high-score chasers will absolutely adore. *




98

The Making Of ...



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLATFORM:** ARCADE
- » **RELEASED:** 1989
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORM
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £100+ FOR AN ORIGINAL PCB

Strider







Inspiration can come from the most unlikely of places, as Darran Jones discovered when he quizzed Strider co-creator Kouichi Yotsui

"I had gone up to the rooftop in order to reflect on my mood," remembers Kouichi Yotsui, the creator of one of Capcom's most memorable arcade games. "It was only after the door had closed that I realised that it could only be opened from the inside." Completely stranded in the second-biggest city in Japan with no way of contacting anyone – this was long before mobile phones – Yotsui's next move was not only one of sheer desperation, but it would also spark a creative seed for the new game he was working on.

"I was in danger of being frozen to death, but noticed that there were only a few metres between my work building and the one next door. I began to climb down the side of the building in order to reach the emergency stairs, desperately afraid that I would die from the fall. Even then, though, I was thinking about the game and came to the conclusion that anybody that wanted to do that kind of thing must be crazy."

Yotsui safely made it back to terra firma and went on to create one of the Eighties' most spectacular-looking arcade games. What's particularly interesting about *Strider*, however, is that it wasn't the result of just one man's vision, but rather several, as *Strider* became a collaboration between Capcom and Moto Kikaku, a group of famous Japanese manga artists that had been founded by Hiroshi Motomiya.

"At the time I was working for Capcom's first project team when a manga, Famicom and arcade collaboration project came up," recalls Yotsui. I was placed in charge of the arcade version by [Tokuro Fujiwara], who was my manager at the time. When I asked him why he had chosen me, his simple reply was: 'You have really good negotiation skills.' I'm guessing he was expecting a lot of meetings with people outside Capcom."

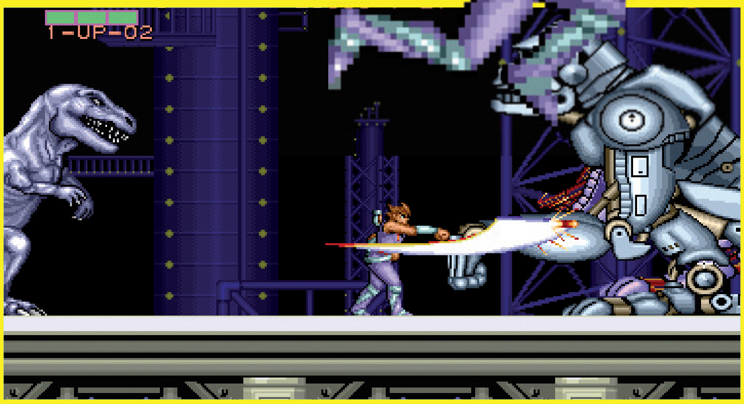
Although Fujiwara, Takashi Nishiyama and Yoshiki Okamoto were overseeing the project as Capcom's heads of development, it wasn't until newcomer Akio Sakai suggested collaborating with a media outside the world of videogames that Moto Kikaku was actually approached. After initial meetings, the core teams for each project were quickly assembled. Masahiko Kurokawa was placed in charge of the Famicom version, Tatsumi Wada and his manager Hiroshi Motomiya were chosen to front the manga iteration, and Yotsui was placed in charge of the arcade game. What followed was a rigorous meeting that would attempt to iron out the background of this new world.

"I remember Capcom's president Kenzo Tsujimoto booking us into the Shinjuku Hilton Hotel and keeping us in there for a week so we could create the framework for the character, story and world view," laughs Yotsui. "We were occasionally joined by both Sakai-san and Fujiwara-san at several points, and the meetings would get quite intense, but we were able to get the outline of the characters decided within that week. We came up with the name Hiryu and had the setting for his circumstances as well as a core outline for the story."

Although initial ideas were put in place, Yotsui and Kurokawa found themselves constantly travelling between Capcom's Osaka-based office and Moto Kikaku, which was based in Chiba. Lodging with Wada, they would constantly discuss new ideas over dinner. Needless to say, with three strong-willed individuals working on the project, it wasn't always smooth sailing. "Of course, there were differences between our opinions, but as we continued each discussion it simply allowed us to place *Strider*'s world together more effectively."

Another benefit, the trio discovered, was Kurokawa and Yotsui's backgrounds in film. Having both graduated in the film departments of their respective art universities, they were able to write out a suitable scenario for Strider Hiryu's first adventure.

Tatsumi Wada employed a professional manga writer, who brushed up the script and the original design to make it feel more like a manga title, while Kurokawa drew inspiration from both the new manga concept and their



» [Arcade] Level 5's boss rush sees you facing off against virtually every boss and sub-boss from the previous four levels. They're far tougher this time around, though, so be careful.

original ideas. Yotsui, on the other hand, who had already proven his mastery of the CPS-1 hardware with *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*, decided to utilise the raw power of the arcade board to make his version of *Strider* as spectacular as possible. Therefore, three distinct versions of the game emerged from one core idea.

With Moto Kikaku hard at work on the manga, Kurokawa and Yotsui set to work on their own versions of *Strider*. The Famicom version, while lacking the sheer spectacle of the arcade outing, is nevertheless an impressive piece of work that features tight level design, a well-paced story, and nicely animated sprites, although they're obviously not as dynamic or well-animated as the arcade offering. Far more adventure-based than its arcade counterpart and with a story that ties in more closely with the manga, it shares elements with the *Mega Man* series as you gain new abilities after defeating certain bosses. Interestingly, NES *Strider* was only released in North America, despite its close ties with the Moto Kikaku manga. It was also released several months after Yotsui's arcade offering.

But why did Yotsui choose to create a title that stood apart from its two peers? "Well, the manga contains some excellent human drama, and it's in that detail where the enjoyment is," he begins. "I obviously wanted to represent that enjoyment, but considering that arcade games are meant to be one play for one coin, I didn't feel that this approach was very suitable. If I wanted to tell *Strider*'s story literally I knew that it would be hard-pressed to compete with the Famicom version and that it would have an even harder time if compared directly with the manga. However, by describing the action through visual imagery, I felt that the arcade version would be able to turn the table in my favour. While *Strider* was obviously a collaborative project, I felt that we should all heighten the *Strider* world by using the methods that each version excelled at."

Told via stylish cut-scenes that open each of its five levels, the story of arcade *Strider* is actually far more in-depth than what is shown in the finished game. A small European nation called Kafazu is attacked by an unknown army that quickly goes on to dominate the rest of Europe and several other continents in its ruthless quest for world domination. With the fate of the planet uncertain and now resting in the iron grip of Grandmaster Meio, Strider Hiryu is called in to defeat the ruthless dictator and restore balance. What follows is a rollercoaster ride through Kafazu, the icy wastes of Siberia, and the verdant jungles of the Amazon. Hiryu even finds time to take down a huge flying battleship before he finally tracks Grandmaster Meio down to his well-guarded fortress.

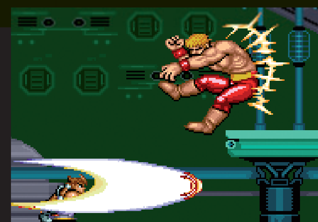
Usually consisting of nothing more than a few short frames to deliver the setup for the next level, *Strider*'s cut-scenes stay in the memory due to the multiple languages used in each scene.

"It was mainly because I wanted to give *Strider* a really exotic mood," begins Yotsui. "When I was young there were no networks like we have today and it was only television that was able to show you all these exciting places from



BOSS RUSH

Strider is full of spectacular bosses. Here's the full selection with handy tips



Strobaya

When you first meet this muscle man, he's linked to some sort of life-support system. He soon breaks free, however, and proceeds to attack you by rolling into you and hurling you across the screen. Luckily, despite his fearsome appearance, he swiftly falls to your falchion. Oh, and once you have finally defeated him, remember to stand under the platform on the far left to avoid the falling flames.



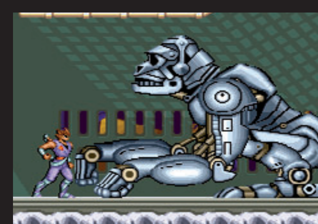
Novo

Before your encounter with Urobolos, you'll be forced to take out this rather nasty sentry drone. Guarding the passageway that you need to drop down into and spitting out lasers, Novo turns out to be an annoyance rather than a threat. It's not too hard to work out the patterns of his attacks, so you should be able to get by him with Strider taking little or no damage.



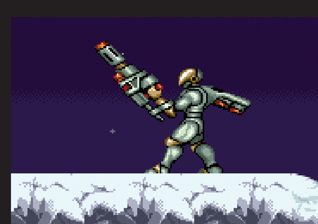
Urobolos

This metallic millipede resides at the end of *Strider*'s first stage and can be a handful. Made up of numerous commanders who impressively morph into him as Strider arrives at their chamber, he's a rather tricky foe who attacks with a gun and a deadly hammer/sickle combination. In a rather cool move, it's possible to jump on his back and ride him as he crawls his way around the screen.



Mecha Pon

Found midway through the excellent Siberia stage, Mecha Pon is a gigantic metallic gorilla that forces Strider to combat him in tight corners. While his first form is fairly easy to beat, he does have long reach that can easily catch you unawares. Even when you've finally defeated the metallic ape, Strider's troubles aren't over, as it immediately bursts into flames that can cause further damage.



Solo

Solo is another mid-level boss that can be found on Stage 2. The airborne bounty hunter who takes more than a little inspiration from *Star Wars*' Boba Fett likes to keep his distance and pepper you with homing missiles and a deadly laser. The trick here is to jump into him and then attack, as he takes a while to respond. Do this a few times and you'll quickly blow him to pieces.



The Kuniang MA Team

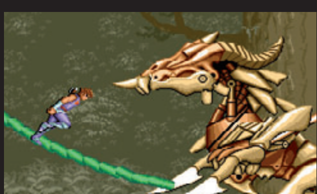
This trio of beautiful ladies can be found at the end of *Strider*'s second stage. Guarding your entry to the huge floating battleship Balrog, they prove to be almost as nimble as Strider and can cause no end of trouble for the novice player. Sliding floor attacks are a great way to cut through their defences, but otherwise it's simply a case of using timing and avoiding their deadly kicks.



Battleship Balrog Core
Easily the most spectacular moment in the game. Climbing into a huge anti-gravity chamber, your first course of action is to take out the satellites around him. Once you've taken them down, launch into the air and attack as you fly around. You won't do it on your first pass, but energy can be found at the bottom of the chamber.



Captain Beard
The captain of the Balrog is incredibly simple. Immediately after you've defeated the core, you race along the outside, desperately trying to stay ahead of the flames. Once you climb to safety, the pirate is waiting on a flying skiff that will allow you to escape. Luckily he offers virtually no resistance with his whip attack.



Lagoumechanic
This oversized chicken dinosaur dragon thing is a nightmare to defeat, especially in his second form. Try to grab the overhanging branch, as it makes your job a lot easier. You need to avoid the flaming dragons he spits from his mouth and use timing to evade his claws. Annoying, but he can be defeated with practice.



Grandmaster Meio
Unsurprisingly the final boss is the toughest in the game. He zips around the screen and fires out devastating lightning bolts that turn into killer fish or wolves whenever they hit the ground. Make good use of the life power-ups that are available, attack hard and fast, and you'll have a good chance of besting him.

around the world. My impression was that the TV programmes imported from overseas were far more light-hearted and often featured adventures that saw explorers searching uncivilised jungles or going on ocean adventures. I was there thinking: 'Wow! There is a world out there that we cannot communicate within the language we know!' I wanted *Strider* to be able to run around an immense world that was filled with marvels, and I based it on those early TV shows that I would watch."

While *Strider*'s locations were exotic and totally different to its arcade brethren, the many bosses that Hiryu encountered were even more outlandish, continuing the coin-op's distinctive feel. One minute you're watching in awe as a council of Kafazu dignitaries morph into a gigantic sickle-wielding millipede, and the next you're facing off against an enormous metallic gorilla, flying around a huge drone in a gravity-free containment unit, or battling a golden dragon after hitching a ride on the back of a dinosaur. And let's not forget the climactic battle against Grandmaster Meio that had Hiryu leaping desperately around the screen while avoiding the boss's devastating lightning attacks.

Interestingly, despite Meio's close resemblance to *Star Wars*' Emperor Palpatine, Yotsui's actual inspiration came from a completely different source, with the designer combing everything from his childhood memories to works of literature in order to create the bosses that made *Strider* such a memorable experience.

"Grandmaster Meio was actually inspired from an image I saw in JRR Tolkien's *The Lord Of The Rings*," he begins. "I got the idea of Urobolos from an old children's picture book that I used to enjoy, while Mecha Pon was simply



» [Arcade] The Amazon stage has you swinging through trees, fighting off natives and hitching rides on dinosaurs.

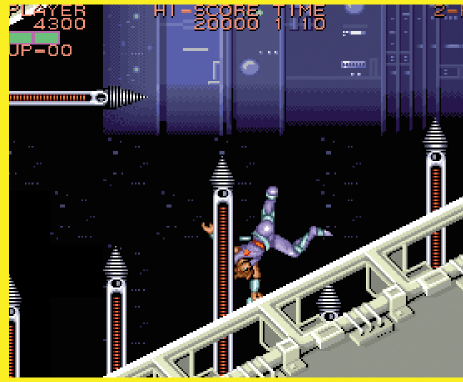
my homage to the Toho movie character Mechani-Kong. Lagoumechanic, on the other hand, was a little more convoluted. I saw it as an evolution of the dinosaurs on the Amazon level, but gave it the frame of a fowl. The attack where it reaches out at you with its huge claw represents a chicken scratching around for food. Finally, I based its head on the front of an F-16 fighter."

Another interesting aspect of *Strider*'s inventive mayors is that they're one of the first examples of the boss rush, which would go on to become a staple part of Capcom's newer games, especially titles like *Devil May Cry* and *Viewtiful Joe*. After taking down robotic drones that look suspiciously like *Return Of The Jedi*'s AT-ST walkers, and facing a breathtaking anti-gravity section full of dangerous spikes and a drop into deep space, Hiryu has to contend with virtually every boss in quick succession, before finally using Urobolos to hitch a lift to the waiting Grandmaster Meio.

It's a fantastic, if thoroughly draining, end to an astounding game, but *Strider*'s boss rush didn't originate from any reason other than to get the most out of



» Art design from *Strider*'s Amazon level. Note the design of Lagoumechanic in the background.



» [Arcade] The final stage is full of amazingly tricky sections, including this stressful anti-gravity area.

the CPS-1's limited memory.

"We were obviously working to a tight budget, so I simply ended up reusing the earlier bosses as a way of saving memory," explains Yotsui. "The basic idea is to compound enemies by simply reusing the same sprites; it's a simple educational process when you're making videogames. Of course, I applied this same structure to the bosses, but did make them far tougher in order to challenge the player."

Strider's magnificent bosses were backed up by some truly spectacular sprite and art design that really pushed the relatively new CPS-1 hardware. Debuting on huge 28-inch monitors and constantly assaulting you with its gaudy visuals and dazzling enemy design, it constantly drew crowds whenever anybody was playing it. Indeed, even today, *Strider*'s visuals still manage to inspire, both due to their otherworldly design and the sheer imagination that can be seen in every single screen. This graphical splendour was also important to Yotsui, and he was adamant that his own interpretation of *Strider* would not only stand apart from its peers but also any other arcade games.

"For me, an arcade game's destiny is that it has to represent the drama and story of what's happening on screen as effectively as possible," he continues. "There's often no other escape route for the staff who are working on it, so the best way of making your point is by using visual expression. I always want to capture the dramatic side of things when creating games, and the new CPS board enabled me to do that. I knew that my options were limited and that if I wanted to get the best out of both the game and the system I had to be as thorough as possible. When playing games there really isn't anything else to compare them to, so you would make them fundamentally 'all about the visuals'".

While *Strider*'s visuals still hold their own today, it's every bit down to the athleticism of Hiryu himself as it is to the gob-smackingly beautiful visuals.



IT'S STRIDER, ONLY NOT

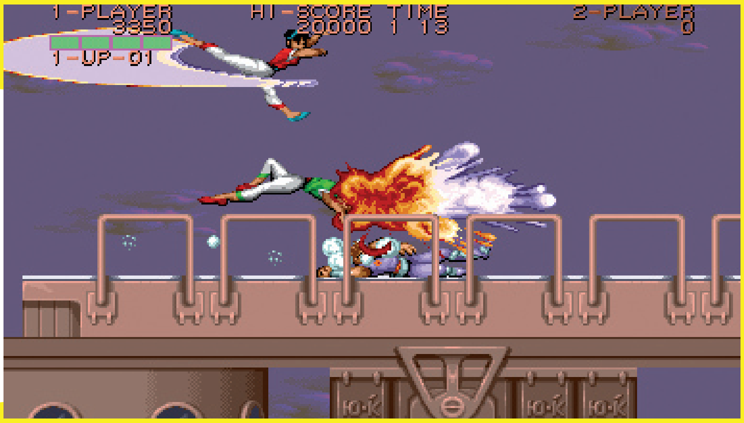


Cannon Dancer, known as *Osman* outside Japan, is a superb *Strider* clone that captures the brilliance and flamboyant style of the Capcom coin-op. Graphically stunning in places and often surpassing *Strider* with its inventive level design and wacky bosses, it's normally spoken about in revered terms by anyone who's been lucky enough to discover it. While many are quick to note its similarities to *Strider*, not everyone knows why the titles are so similar.

"Oh, making a spiritual sequel to *Strider* was always intentional," laughs Yotsui, as he's actually responsible for the design on both games. "When I joined Mitchell Corp, the first thing they said to me was: 'Make a game like *Strider*.' I'm very self-assertive and wanted to put as much of my personality into the game as possible. Although it's obviously not a sequel to *Strider* from a story point of view, it is by the same developer, so you can read into that what you like."

Wanting to show off just how nimble his version of Strider could be – Kurokawa's version is like a pensioner in comparison – Yotsui created a digital playground that allowed gamers to really experiment with the character's abilities. Indeed, from the moment he glides in and starts swinging his falchion through hordes of enemies, you're instantly in awe of his athleticism. Huge gantries, cavernous holes, and gigantic cogs – each and every one allows Strider to climb and explore his beautifully created world in a way that was simply mesmerising back in the day. Gracefully cart-wheeling through the air, dispensing enemies with a lethal sliding attack, hanging from the undersides of flying skiffs using just his hands, climbing up sheer surfaces like a monkey… He's an absolute joy to control and stands proudly apart from virtually any other arcade hero we can think of, although this athleticism wasn't without some downfalls. "We used a tremendous amount of data for Hiryu's animation," recalls Yotsui when we asked him how Capcom was able to create such a spectacular-looking hero. "In fact, I'm pretty sure we used the same amount of data on *Strider*'s animation that we would use on two games back then."

Hiryu's agility actually stems from Yotsui's own love of outdoor pursuits, not to mention that aforementioned climb to a neighbouring building. "I love mountain-climbing, so I would say that definitely affected *Strider*'s gameplay and level design," continues Yotsui. "I love the feeling I get when I'm climbing over a high, mysterious peak; that feeling when the air hits you. I'm also a big fan of skiing and diving, which makes me feel like I'm being thrown into the air. Above all, though, I wanted to imagine a world that would feature all those strangely mixed-up elements."



» [Arcade] Strider's slide attack is absolutely devastating and makes short work of his opponents.

Yotsui's love of rock-climbing is most notable in *Strider*'s second stage, which is still one of the greatest levels that you'll ever see in a videogame. Featuring dramatic battles with both huge robotic gorilla Mecha Pon and Solo, a bounty hunter for hire who looks suspiciously like Boba Fett, *Strider*'s greatest moment happens immediately after he dispatches Solo. Standing at the precipice of a mountain, the crazy Hiryu simply runs down it, setting off mines as he does so, before majestically cart-wheeling to safety. It's an unforgettable moment that's made all the better by the excellent audio that accompanies it.

Like its astonishing visuals, *Strider*'s compositions are also over and above what was typical of the time, giving the on-screen events a huge amount of gravitas. The sweeping orchestral arrangements – the Mega Drive and PC Engine versions feature even more stirring tunes – matched Hiryu's on-screen shenanigans magnificently, giving *Strider* a truly epic feel.

"At the beginning I would intrude so much that I would simply confuse Junko Tamiya, *Strider*'s composer," laughs Yotsui as he recalls the creation of the game's epic tunes and how he wanted them to be "just perfect". "I remember making her listen to Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite Of Spring* over and over again and then stated that her work was unreasonable. I would even hum the song to her myself. I admit that my attention to detail was a little crazy. It got to a stage when a notice was put on the sound room's door stating: 'The game designer from the first project team

THE ADVENTURES OF STRIDER

Join us as we take a look at the rest of the Strider franchise – both standalone



Strider
■ **Format: NES**
■ **Year Released: 1989**
Although Masahiko Kurokawa's take on *Strider* doesn't match the sheer brilliance of Yotsui's arcade-powered vision, it remains a surprisingly strong release that was typical of the high-quality titles that Capcom was producing on Nintendo's 8-bit system at the time.

Strider Returns
■ **Format: Various**
■ **Year Released: 1990**
After acquiring the licence to convert the original coin-op to home computers and consoles, Tiertex and US Gold released this dismal effort that did nothing but give Capcom's classic a bad name. Level design was dull, bosses lacked imagination, and even the graphics were nothing special.





Strider 2
■ **Format: Arcade**
■ **Year Released: 2000**
Capcom released a true sequel to *Strider* in 2000, which very nearly eclipsed its original effort. Graphically it's astonishing, making great use of the Sony ZN-2 hardware. Filled with over-the-top bosses and inventive set pieces, it's only really let down by being a little too easy.

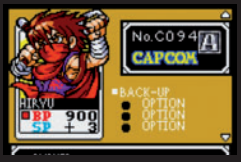
Marvel vs Capcom: Clash Of Super Heroes
■ **Format: Arcade**
■ **Year Released: 1998**
Any game that allows you to pit Strider against the Hulk is always going to be entertaining, but you'll still be impressed with just how much fun *Marvel vs Capcom* actually is. Strider is a playable fighter and has lots of amazing moves.



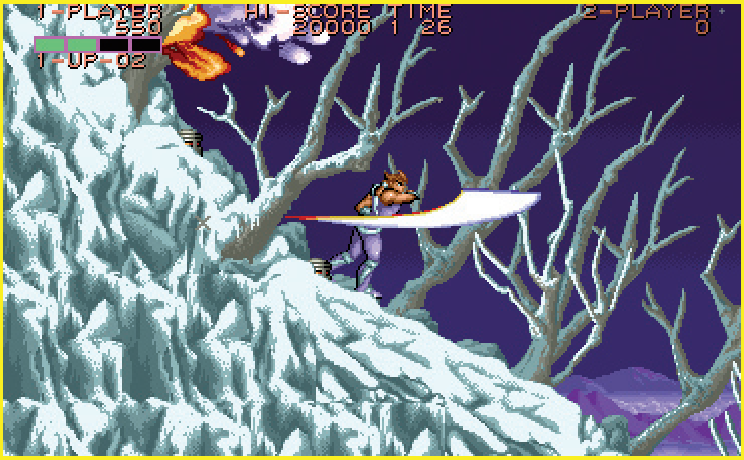


Marvel vs Capcom 2: New Age Of Heroes
■ **Format: Arcade**
■ **Year Released: 2000**
Although the concept changed slightly, this was otherwise business as usual, with Capcom producing another slick brawler. Strider Hiryu returns to the fray and is just as deadly as he was in the first game.

SNK vs Capcom: Card Fighter's Clash
■ **Format: Neo Geo Pocket**
■ **Year Released: 1999**
Strider's appearance in this strategy franchise is limited to a few appearances. Players can unlock cards, which feature characters from both the Capcom and SNK universes. Strider is not only hard to find, but rather strong as well.




» [Mega Drive] It's not as perfect as the Sharp X68000 conversion, but we'd wager that it was far more popular.


» [Arcade] Easily the most spectacular moment in the game. It was sequences like Strider's downhill run that made the game so popular with gamers.

is not allowed to enter!'

"Eventually, though, the composer began to understand exactly what I did and didn't like and she began creating pieces that I have no problems with. Fortunately, she was surrounded by a very talented team in the sound room that helped matters greatly. I was making a lot of demands but it was because I felt that the atmosphere for each scene was so important. I was taking my inspiration from classic ballet or old Walt Disney cartoons, and I wanted *Strider* to have music that could be dramatic, but also had a lot of energy to it. I would just stand there screaming behind all the sound staff while not actually doing anything!"

With Yotsui constantly expecting perfection from his staff, it should come as no surprise to learn that *Strider*'s development wasn't exactly smooth sailing for all involved. Strider's original eight-month development plan was constantly delayed, and the ten-man team was soon joined by members of Capcom's other projects in order to get the game finished. Despite the young age of Yotsui, he was shown an unusually large amount of leniency from Fujiwara, who ensured that *Strider* was only finished when Yotsui said so.

"He was known as a manager who was very strict with his junior staff, but he was surprisingly generous towards me while I was working on *Strider*," recalls Yotsui. Despite the fact that we were working on this collaboration, I was allowed free rein to do whatever I wanted with the arcade iteration, and I was never forced to copy ideas from the other two projects. When making *Strider* I just did what I felt was right, and I felt as one with the game. Even if there had been demand from elsewhere I would have simply overturned it."

Eventually released in 1989 to great critical acclaim, we asked Yotsui why he thought that the game became such a success and why so many gamers still enjoy the franchise that *Strider* eventually spawned. "When *Strider* was first created, all of the staff, including myself, were in their mid-twenties," he begins. "There was a potent mixture of immaturity and far too much confidence that resulted in a truly great game."

So the big question now that Yotsui is aware of just how many people still love his game – in typical Japanese fashion, he was reluctant to discuss *Strider*'s 2000 sequel – would he perhaps be persuaded to return on a new game?

"Well, I would if Capcom put forth their usual audacity and gave me a call," he laughs. "Having said that, I can't really see how *Strider* would be successful in today's market. With *Strider*, gamers seem to connect with its controls and the magnificent stage development and spectacular sequences. If they're now looking for that type of image in a new game, I could easily see it causing budget bankruptcy. It wouldn't necessarily be a good business idea, and if it was given a limited budget you would have a contradiction in quality that meant it wouldn't really feel like a *Strider* game. Having to decide upon making a game that offers emotional effect or is simply a business success is a very hard question to answer. The original *Strider* was already in the low profit range and, as a product, was never that easy to market."

"I'm just truly touched that there are people out there who still enjoy *Strider* some 20 years after its original release."


» [Arcade] This screenshot from *Street Fighter Alpha 2* isn't a cameo, as it's actually someone dressing up as Hiryu.



LIGHT YEARS AHEAD OF THE COMPETITION

If you're a fan of *Strider* there's only one website worth visiting. The Light Sword Cypher Mainframe contains everything from a friendly forum to lots of useful information about Capcom's greatest arcade game. Owner Sam Roberts is meticulous in chasing up every possible *Strider* news story that pops up on the internet and has also put together plenty of interesting features about both the franchise and creator. If you've never heard of the manga before, don't know the difference between Strider Hiryu and Strider Mariya, or just want to learn more about this spectacular franchise, then this should be your first stop. Visit **www.lscmainframe.net** for more information.

games and his guest appearances



Namco X Capcom

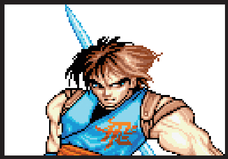
- **Format: PS2**
- **Year Released: 2005**

Monolith Soft decided to apply the concept of the Capcom *Versus* series to the RPG. The end result received mixed reviews and didn't receive an official English translation. This is a shame, as Hiryu has quite a prominent role in the game.

Adventure Quiz: Capcom World 2

- **Format: Arcade**
- **Year Released: 1992**

While we love the idea of an arcade game that tests your Capcom knowledge, *Capcom World 2*'s Japanese text makes it impenetrable. Still, it features a cameo from Hiryu, so *Strider* fans might want to start brushing up on their kanji.





Capcom Fighting All-Stars

- **Format: Arcade**
- **Year Released: N/A**

Capcom Fighting All-Stars was due to be a 3D take on the *Versus* series and originally went into testing in 2002. Hiryu made the cut and his 3D incarnation looks pretty sweet, but disastrous tests meant that the game never made it past the alpha stage.

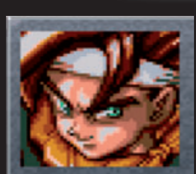


Thanks to Maiko Hinson for her invaluable translation, Kouichi Yotsui for his time and, finally, Sam Roberts for his helpful assistance and making an arduous eight-year quest a reality.



THE CHARACTERS

The Nineties were an amazing time for console RPGs, with no system playing host to more classics of the genre than that 16-bit work of art, the Super Nintendo. Yet among the *Earthbounds*, *Lufias* and *Final Fantasies* of the time emerged one title that many still hold as the pinnacle of tile-based RPGs: the masterpiece that is *Chrono Trigger*. Now, 15 years since its original release, Craig Ritchie gives this epic from role-playing authority Square a long-deserved Classic Game go-over.

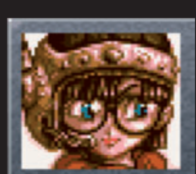


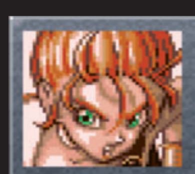
CRONO

WEAPON: KATANA
MAGIC: LIGHTNING
On the verge of adulthood, young Crono leaves his peaceful home in Truce Village to embark on a quest through time to save all he holds dear from the devastating alien being known as Lavos.

LUCCA

WEAPON: GUNS
MAGIC: FIRE
One of Crono's close friends and an apprentice inventor, the fire-wielding Lucca adds a cyberpunk element to the game with her handcrafted guns and technical projectile weapons.



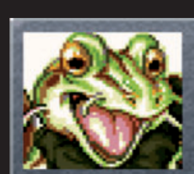


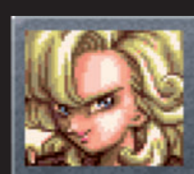
MARLE

WEAPON: CROSSBOW
MAGIC: ICE
Marle is, in fact, the alter-ego and secret identity of Princess Nadia of the Kingdom of Guardia, and it is her magic pendant that kick-starts the band of adventurers' travels through time.

FROG

WEAPON: BROADSWORD
MAGIC: WATER
A gallant amphibian of honour, Frog is a true standout character and our pick for favourite in the game – so much so that he gets his own entry on the opposite page.



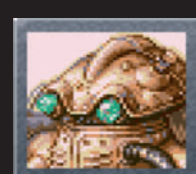


AYLA

WEAPON: HANDS
MAGIC: NONE
A fierce warrior from 65 million years BC, Ayla is chief of the Ioka people. Unable to draw upon the elements because she was born before the time of magic, she has instead honed her cat-like fighting style.

ROBO

WEAPON: ARMS
MAGIC: SHADOW
A powerful android, Robo is an outcast due to having different programming from his peers. He proves a great asset to the party, both for his potent attacks and healing beam powers.



MEMORABLE MOMENTS



WHY IS IT A CLASSIC?



A varied adventure

Combining traditional fantasy, time travel, cyberpunk and more into one incredible package, *Chrono Trigger* has topped numerous 'best game ever' lists and holds a special place in the hearts of RPG fans. Thanks to its outstanding plot, exceptional musical score, varied locations and a cast of characters with fleshed-out personalities and histories that you actually care about, it's easy to see why this is regarded as such a classic. What's more, Square did a great job of ensuring that combat required genuine strategy rather than the formulaic hit-hit-heal of so many other old-school RPGs. Pure RPG excellence.

BEST CHARACTER



A ma… frog of honour

This would have to be our good friend Frog. Formerly a human squire by the name of Glenn, Frog has an extensive back story, which is initially left a mystery but is revealed to the player through a number of lengthy and well-executed cut-scenes as the game progresses. Driven by honour and a strong sense of duty to protect Queen Leene, Frog is also seeking vengeance for the death of his friend and mentor, Cyrus. He is the traditional gallant hero – a knight in all but title, complete with chivalrous personality, an affinity for healing magic, and devastating skill with a broadsword.

BEST BOSS



Keep your enemies closer

The dark wizard Magus holds this honour. When the party faces him in his own castle as he attempts to summon Lavos, the mage is easily the toughest foe they have encountered in their quest so far. Crono and his cohorts find themselves having to constantly adjust their strategy to counter the varying magical attacks that Magus has at his command, as well as find the time for plenty of healing between his savage onslaughts of Dark Matter magic blasts. Although defeated during this first battle, Magus reappears later and proves a very central figure in Crono's struggle against Lavos.

BEST MOVE



Many hands make light work

There are scores of special moves – or 'techniques', as they are called in *Chrono Trigger* parlance. Although each character has their own unique special attacks that get ever more powerful as they advance to the higher levels, it's the combination attacks that really add a unique flavour to the battles. There are some incredible dual and triple techniques, which merge your characters' powers into devastating attacks, complete with flashy graphical sequences. For us, a standout is Crono, Frog and Robo's Triple Raid technique, which unleashes massive damage on all but the most resilient of enemies.

BEST STAGE



We'll have a gay old time

Chrono Trigger is replete with diverse environments, ranging from standard fantasy fare to futuristic high-tech dome environments through to prehistoric savage lands. Thanks to its unique character, lively music and richly coloured locations, the jungle levels of 65,000,000 BC earn themselves the honour of being our favourite. It's here that we are introduced to Ayla and her tribe and get to enjoy a great jungle party and dance sequence, complete with 'soup' drinking contest. This era also has its own currency based on feathers, claws and other animal artefacts, which can be traded for some unique items.

STANDOUT MOMENT



You have my sword…

Acquiring the Masamune sword is a major achievement for Frog and a turning point in the game. Until being reassembled thanks to the efforts of Crono and his party, this legendary blade had not been handled since Frog's mentor Cyrus wielded it against Magus so many years ago. After a compulsory side quest that slips perfectly into the plot of the main adventure, the Masamune goes on to prove an indispensable weapon during some of the most significant battles in the game. What's more, this already-powerful sword can be upgraded late in the quest, making a devastating weapon into pure broadsword brilliance.

What the press said… ages ago

RPG Fan 97%

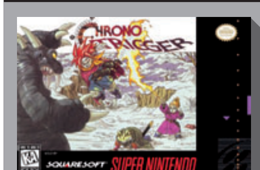
"Squaresoft makes time travel fascinating, and the game's fantastic yet not overly complex plotline will grip you to the end. The simplicity is what keeps the awe. Seeing the future world and how it turns out is shocking and amazing in its own sense. Science fiction doesn't get much better than this trip through the ages."

Nintendo Life 10/10

"There's absolutely no denying that *Chrono Trigger* is, and will always be, one of the most unforgettable RPG experiences ever to grace a videogame console. Even the first time you play the game, you'll immediately know that you're playing something special and a game you're not likely to ever forget."

What we think

Picking up *Chrono Trigger* after all these years was one of the most rewarding experiences we've had in ages. Grab yourself a copy of the excellent DS edition or spend the time and money to track down the original – this is one well worth replaying or even discovering anew.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** SNES
- **PUBLISHER:** SQUARESOFT
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1995
- **GENRE:** RPG
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £50+ FOR THE SNES VERSION, £10 FOR THE DS VERSION, £25 FOR THE PLAYSTATION VERSION



FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

Traveller's Tales

Working with the likes of Disney, Pixar, Sega and LucasArts has given Traveller's Tales a reputation to deliver. From Leander to Lego, co-founder Jon Burton explains to Matthew Reynolds how it used its licences to thrill

Licensed games are widely regarded as some of the most difficult and stressful to work on; rapid development cycles, limited source material and immense publisher pressures push development studios to the brink. But for 20 years, Traveller's Tales has worked with the world's biggest brands and has thrived, and today remains one of the few studios to consistently deliver in this harsh and competitive field.

Its co-founder Jon Burton has survived with it, now acting as the company director. And like many budding developers, his first encounter with a computer was seemingly by chance. "I remember I went on holiday and my uncle had a VIC-20 computer," he explains. "I must have been 13 or 14. I had never used a computer before, so I typed in what was on the back, and it made this weird noise and flash, and I thought, 'Wow, that just did what I told it to do.' And that was it. That really interested me, and I certainly desperately wanted a computer at that point."

From there, he was hooked. The Commodore PETs and VIC-20s at school allowed Jon to pursue his passion for programming, coming up with a platformer called *Indiana Fred And The House Of Doom*, an interesting starting point considering his company's later releases. His parents managed to scrape together enough cash for a Sinclair Spectrum, where he tried his hand at being published, submitting games to publishers like Firebird, only to get polite letters of rejection.

However, the Commodore Amiga, purchased with money supposed to be used for driving lessons, saw him pursue a slightly different path. "I started writing demos. What interested me more than the games – which were not brilliant at the start – were the way demos were put together by these people pushing what the Amiga was great for, which was this big box of chips that no one knew how they tied together. You could show off, show this many sprites or this many colours, so that was a great learning curve of what you could do."

Jon would spend many late nights hosting demo competitions with his friends, all sat with their Amigas, trying to outdo each other. He used to display his efforts in a computer shop in Southport, which he describes as "very geeky, but couldn't be cooler at the time", and became a location that would prove instrumental in his making.

It was here that he met fellow co-founder Andy Ingram, and the idea to create a game popped into his head once more. "I thought, 'An artist! Great! Let's put a game together.' So we did a test demo, which was a scrolling background and a dragon with a programmed neck and legs. It looked nice. And someone who worked at the shop got us an interview with Psygnosis to show the game."

A foot in the door

Such a meeting was something the duo could only dare dream of: up until that point their best hope was to publish through a budget label such as Codemasters, let alone Psygnosis, which they regarded

INSTANT EXPERT

The name Traveller's Tales is inspired by the name of chapter six in Carl Sagan's popular science book *Cosmos*

Traveller's Tales' first game was *Leander* on the Amiga. Unofficially, it was *Indiana Fred And The House Of Doom* for the Commodore VIC-20

The founding members honed their craft by pushing the Amiga hardware to the limit in a series of late-night demo contests

Traveller's Tales has worked with the likes of Sony's David Jaffe, Sega's Kats Sato and Pixar's John Lasseter over the years

Formed in 2005, publishing arm TT Games comprises several studios. Traveller's Tales remains in Knutsford, while handheld division TT Fusion is based in Whimslow, both in the county of Cheshire. Its head publishing office is in Maidenhead, Berkshire

TT Games is one of the few publishers to focus primarily on games for younger gamers and families

TT Games also runs TT Animation, which uses its videogame rendering engine to create children's television programmes. Its first programme, *What's Your News?*, won the Grand Prix Japan Prize in 2009



SONIC 3D BLAST



“We showed Psygnosis the demo and it said, ‘We’d like to publish it.’ We said no!”

JON AND ANDY MAKE SURE TO TAKE THINGS SLOWLY



as “the pinnacle of games” at the time. “We showed [the demo] to the director, Ian Headlington, and he said, ‘We’d like to finance and publish it,’” said Jon. And their response? “We said no! ‘We’re not sure we can make a game yet. We’ll come back in a month if that’s okay,’ and walked out. And looking back, how dumb was that?” Thankfully, Psygnosis wasn’t offended: “They said, ‘Okay, fair enough,’ and we went back in a month and luckily they still wanted to publish it, because obviously someone else could have walked in with something better, but they went with it. Looking back, they might have been impressed that we didn’t just jump at the opportunity, so who knows how that tracked.”

Jon fondly remembers the many late nights in 1990 working on their first game, *Leander*. “Our whole time of day had just skewed so badly because we used to work all night, going to bed at eight in the morning, [then] go to Andy’s house for breakfast, which was at about supper, then sleep. You just lived and breathed it. It was such a passion.” A year later the title was finished and published for the Amiga, an action platformer likened to a previous Psygnosis adventure: *Shadow Of The Beast*. “It rated really well, and sold okay as an Amiga game,” said Jon, impressing enough for EA to request a port for the newly released Sega Mega Drive (as *The Legend Of Galahad*), which he recommended demo scene friend David Dootson to help out with, and later hired into the company.

The team then worked on *Puggsy*, which started life as a demo from another team that found it difficult to translate into a fully fledged game. Jon scrapped almost everything, keeping only the main character, and finished it in 16 months. At this point the company’s key members were in place: Jon and Andy worked on programming and art respectively, David worked on bringing the title to the Mega-CD, and friend Chris Stanforth worked on the unreleased SNES port. “We really wanted to compete with *Mario*, but the game got lost in the wave of Mega Drive titles,” says Jon. *Puggsy* suffered from a poor marketing budget and failed to reveal its unique physics system until a few stages into the game.

Regardless, Psygnosis was impressed enough with the quartet to offer them *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*, the first of the studio’s many licensed properties. But like that first publishing offer, Jon didn’t jump at the opportunity straight away.

“I was torn with *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*. I liked kids’ games, and personally I’m a Christian, but I thought, ‘If we don’t make it someone else is going to make it. They could make it an awful lot more gory and nasty, and if we make it, we can keep it on the right side.’” It was this offer that made Jon realise that the team needed to break away from the bedroom and set up an office, which *Dracula* helped finance. “It sold well. That’s the first time we got a decent royalty cheque, and it was the first

BY THE NUMBERS

2 BAFTAs have been awarded to the company for its work on the *Lego* franchise

6 classic Disney scenes were playable in *Mickey Mania*, with an additional *Band Concert* stage in the Sega versions

7 months was how long it took to develop *Sonic R* and *Toy Story*

16 months to develop *Puggsy*

57 stages in *Puggsy*, 16 of which were hidden

95 was the score given to the company’s debut title *Leander* by *Amiga Power* in February 1992

600 MB worth of textures were created for each planet in *Haven: Call Of The King*

150 people work at the main studio offices in Knutsford

1990 was when Traveller’s Tales was established

80 million games sold in **20** years



[Mega Drive] *Mickey Mania* was simply a stunning game, with excellent visuals and some thrilling set pieces.

TIMELINE

1990 TRAVELLER'S TALES IS FOUNDED BY JON BURTON AND ANDY INGRAM

1991 ITS FIRST TITLE, *LEANDER*, IS PUBLISHED FOR THE AMIGA BY PSYGNOSIS

1993 *BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA*, THE COMPANY'S FIRST LICENSED PRODUCT, IS RELEASED. THE TEAM MOVES INTO ITS FIRST OFFICE

"That was the expectation: that we could get games done in seven months"

JON BURTON ON THE REPUTATION THAT HIS COMPANY HAD BUILT

ONE MAN, ONE PORT

Since the very beginning, from *Leander* and *Puggsy* all the way to the hugely successful *Lego* series, Traveller's Tales has ported its games across numerous systems, which is seen as one of the reasons behind its success. "What we learned pretty early on is if we're going to make a game, then let's get it on as many platforms as possible," says Jon. But it was always economical: a single project was built to be scaled down to different systems, which could be managed by one individual per console. It was a philosophy the entire company was built on. "As long as you build the game in the right way, and you do one game for all formats, the [ports] cost you very little in terms of extra staff." The fact that developer tools would run on the platform – allowing the developer to move objects on the fly – also contributed to the lightning-quick development times.

time we could pay the bills and build our company up!"

Disney and Sega

As Traveller's Tales set up shop above a pet store in Southport, it was its next project that would see it noticed worldwide. "Sony Imagesoft was a new start-up company in Santa Monica, and they pitched to Disney the idea of *Mickey's Birthday Party*," explained Jon. "They said, 'We're interested,' but they realised that they couldn't make this game." Psygnosis, which was owned by Sony at this point, suggested that Traveller's Tales give it a go, and the team pitched a demo.

The team's expertise at pushing 16-bit hardware to the limit paid off. "We had screen-sized bad guys, all animated; we used silicon graphics machines to do 3D sprites; we had tower sections to spin around; and the first ever – forget *Crash Bandicoot* – into-the-screen chase. It was the first time it had ever been done in videogames full stop. Disney assumed that it was on the Mega-CD and all coming off disc, and we said, 'No, standard Mega Drive.' And that got us the gig."

Working on *Mickey Mania* saw Jon first meeting one of the industry's most renowned designers, David Jaffe, but it wasn't a meeting of minds: "He didn't get games. He came from a scriptwriting background at this point, and he hadn't understood anything about the technological constraints on game machines, especially at the time." Meetings were filled with conflicts of interest, with Sony focusing on the narrative side, while TT emphasised that gameplay must come first. "We had some interesting meetings. I know at one point one of them left the room in tears. They just couldn't deal with the discussion."

It was here that Jon realised that his talent lay in the field of licensed products. With a huge amount of creative direction over the project, *Mickey Mania* was the first game he sat down and designed on paper before designing the systems around it. "I've never seen myself given a blank sheet of paper; that's too daunting in a lot of ways. I've always liked a challenge within some guidelines. I think that's where licences and things really suited us well: here's a set of parameters; now go and excel in that direction."

It was a huge success, seeing a worldwide release across a variety of systems, leading into a lucrative relationship with Disney from then on.

While *Mickey Mania*'s brainstorming sessions were filled with frustration, the next collaboration was the exact opposite. Working with the then-unknown Pixar, Disney had little faith in *Toy Story* and gave Traveller's Tales seven months for a game. But it was challenge that he relished, cramming it with all kinds of visual tricks.

"I remember an absolute defining moment. We had met John Lasseter and I had written this *Doom* engine, but on the Mega Drive, which no one had done at the time. I said, 'This is the viewpoint we should do,' and he was saying, 'Well I think it should be more this,' and I suddenly had one of those 'we're not worthy' moments. I'm debating 3D viewpoints with John Lasseter! It was great to meet and chat with these people that I had idolised when I was growing up."

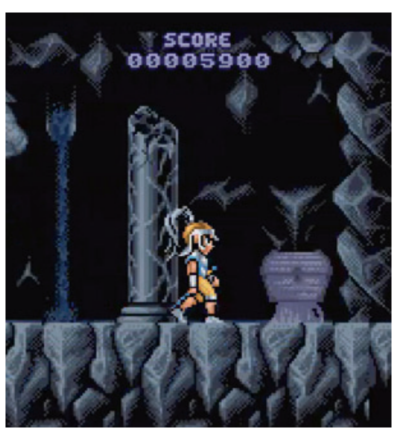
Despite the tight deadline, *Toy Story* hit shelves on time and gave the company a reputation to deliver. "Unfortunately, getting *Toy Story* done meant that was the expectation: that we could get games done in seven months," Jon explained. "If no one else could do it, they would give us a ring. And we did it; we hit the dates. We might not have made a *God Of War*, but then we wouldn't spend three years on it. We would have made something that was entirely acceptable – it wasn't shovelware. Every game had a focus, innovation and concepts that were new and interesting."

It was these concepts that caught the attention of Sega, which proposed a new project for the Mega Drive. At this point, the team was developing on the PlayStation and was keen to jump to the Saturn, until it learned that it would be working on a 16-bit *Sonic* game, which was something that they couldn't turn down.

"Interestingly, it was *Mickey Mania* that made them talk to us," said Jon. "The producer, Kats Sato, was also the producer on *Clockwork Knight*, the game on the Saturn that we took the concept of to make *Toy Story*. And with *Clockwork Knight*, he saw *Mickey Mania* and had taken some of the puzzle ideas and put them in there. So we sort of fed each other from different



[Mega Drive] David Dootson's port of *Leander* became *The Legend Of Galahad* on the Mega Drive.



[Amiga] Traveller's Tales' debut title *Leander* was likened to *Shadow Of The Beast*.

1994 – THE FIRST COLLABORATION WITH DISNEY, *MICKEY MANIA*, IS RELEASED

1995 – TRAVELLER'S TALES STARTS WORK ON *SONIC 3D BLAST* WITH SEGA. CO-FOUNDER ANDY INGRAM AND OTHER STAFF LEAVE THE COMPANY TO FORM HAMMERHEAD

1997 – TRAVELLER'S TALES DEVELOPS AND RELEASES *SONIC R* FOR THE SATURN IN SEVEN MONTHS

1999 – THE COMPANY STARTS WORK ON ITS FOURTH AND FINAL ORIGINAL TITLE, *HAVEN: CALL OF THE KING*, FOR RELEASE IN 2002. IT WOULD BE JON BURTON'S FINAL PROGRAMMING PROJECT

2001 – HAMMERHEAD BREAKS UP AND ITS FOUNDING MEMBERS RETURN TO TRAVELLER'S TALES

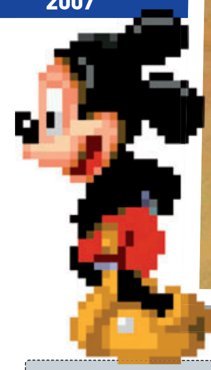
2003 – THE COMPANY OPENS ITS OXFORD STUDIO, WHICH WENT ON TO DEVELOP TWO *CRASH BANDICOOT* TITLES. IT WAS CLOSED IN 2006

2005 – TRAVELLER'S TALES ACQUIRES GIANT INTERACTIVE TO START PUBLISHING ARM TT GAMES, AND HOLDS THE LEGO RIGHTS. *LEGO STAR WARS* IS RELEASED AND BECOMES A SALES SMASH

2007 – TIME WARNER ACQUIRES TT GAMES. WITHIN THE SAME YEAR, THE COMPANY PURCHASES EMBRYONIC STUDIOS TO BECOME TT FUSION



[Saturn] Descended from an F1 game, *Sonic R* was hard to control and light on features.



sides of the planet. So obviously we were on the same wavelength."

On *Sonic 3D Blast*, Traveller's Tales worked on the concept and visuals, while Sega would send over level plans. The partnership saw the team travel to Japan, treat *Sonic* designer Yuji Naka to a meal in Knutsford, and learn a new philosophy in game design. "They sent us this map and there were these bumpers. They said they light up. 'Oh right, so what do they do?' 'It's just for fun.' And it was just that phrase, like a method, all the way through: it's fine to put things in just for fun. They don't have to achieve things. Since then, we've put things in our games that are just for fun."

A company divided

While Traveller's Tales was collaborating with world-class publishers and working with superstar mascots, it was this ambitious and rapid growth that saw the company torn in two. With *Sonic 3D Blast* well under way and another *Toy Story* and a project with artist Rodney Matthews in the pipeline, Jon was working 18-hour days to keep everything ticking over. Jon said that business partner Andy had learned to balance work and social affairs better than he did, and it soon got to a point where he felt that he was doing everything.

He told Andy that he wanted to split the work force to effectively manage the deluge of projects, placing a team on the Rodney Matthews title and letting them split the profits between them. Andy agreed, but came back the next day with a different arrangement. "He had gone to Psygnosis, and they said, 'We'll back you if you want to set up on your own.' They took quite a few key people, and at the time I was quite upset about it. I was trying to make it work with everybody." Andy, Chris Stanforth and several others formed Tales², soon to become Hammerhead.

Looking back, Jon understood the move: "For the people involved it was their big break, their big opportunity. They had been [invited] to be directors of their own company, and Psygnosis would back them. So I could understand it, absolutely." Hammerhead finished the Rodney Matthews project, *Shadow Master*, for the PlayStation and PC in 1999, as well as an excellent PlayStation port of *Quake II*, but by 2002 the company disbanded. Never one to burn bridges, Jon hired its founders back. "What they hadn't understood was the pressures of getting the game in the box, and how stressful that is, and what publishers would do if you don't deliver on time. And that's a hard lesson to learn."

Under pressure

Despite the exodus of talent, the company marched on, and in 1997 it saw its F1 project transformed into *Sonic R*, and was given seven months to complete a game on the notoriously difficult Sega Saturn, which Jon enjoyed: "I love it; a brilliant





[Mega Drive] *Bram Stoker's Dracula* was the first licensed property that the studio worked on.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Jon Burton

Jon Burton
Co-founder Jon Burton remains with the company as its managing director. He was the lead programmer for over a decade, having a hand in practically everything before finishing on his dream project, *Haven: Call Of The King*.

Andy Ingram
Another co-founder, Andy worked on art since *Leander* up until he left to co-found Hammerhead. Now back with TT Games, he continues to work on character art and modelling. "He can turn his hand to anything," says Jon.

David Dootson
Recommended by Jon to work on the Mega Drive port of *Leander* (*The Legend Of Galahad*), David has worked with the company ever since and is now the head of programming. His credits include the Mega-CD version of *Puggsy* and the recent *Lego* releases.

Chris Stanforth
Chris joined to work on SNES ports of *Puggsy*, which never saw the light of day, and *Mickey Mania*. He joined Andy and several others to form Hammerhead, and is now a lead programmer at TT Games.

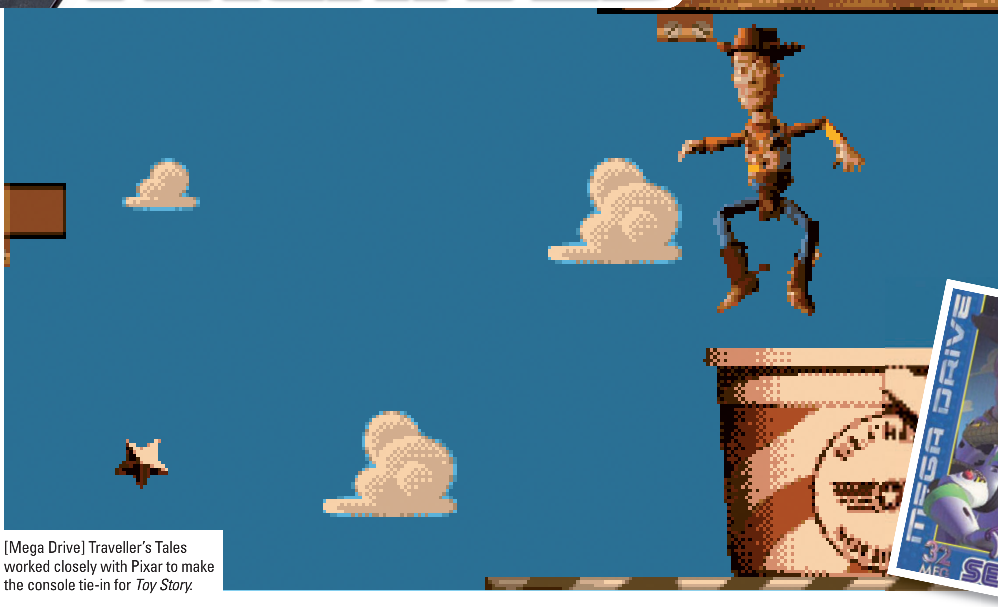
Jeremy Pardon
Hired to work on animation for *Sonic 3D Blast* in 1995, Jeremy also contributed to *Haven: Call Of The King* and the *Lego* titles. He is now the head of animation at TT Games.

James Cunliffe
Fresh out of art college, James offered to work for Traveller's Tales for nothing but ended up becoming a key member of the team. "He really fitted into the company, just when we needed someone as the company split," said Jon. He worked on *Mickey Mania* and *Sonic 3D Blast*, and is now head artist.

Beverley Bush
Joining the company for *Mickey Mania*, Jon hired Beverley based on her work on *Danger Mouse*'s background art. Later joining Hammerhead, she's now a senior lecturer at the University of Central Lancashire for games design.



From left to right: Jon, Andy and Chris.



[Mega Drive] Traveller's Tales worked closely with Pixar to make the console tie-in for *Toy Story*.







[PlayStation] Even Traveller's Tales acknowledged *A Bug's Life*'s many shortcomings.



"It went on for four months solid. Just five hours a day to eat, sleep and argue"

JON BURTON ON HAVEN'S STRENUOUS DEVELOPMENT

bag of bits, just like the Amiga was. I could spend all day finding new, brilliant ways to push the hardware." At this point the company was 25 strong, with around eight members focused on *Sonic R* and the rest on the doomed PlayStation platformer *Rascal*. Psygnosis wanted to rival *Super Mario 64*, but instead of having directional controls, the publisher wanted them to be rotational, much like *Tomb Raider*, and with poor camera options, it was incredibly difficult to play.

It was a decision that ruined the game, but Jon admitted that he let it happen. "Because I was doing *Sonic R*, I thought, 'Well, you're paying the bills'. That's the first time I thought, 'We'll just do that,' but didn't agree with it." Between running the company and acting as lead programmer on a number of projects, Jon worked 18-hour days, seven days a week. Despite the stress, he found it difficult to not have a hand in everything: "I found that really hard, cutting down the hours and letting other people take control of things. I found that more stressful than if I had done it myself.

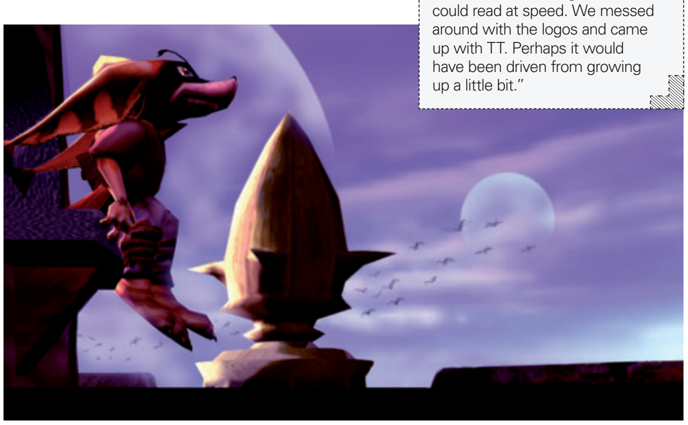
THE MARSUPIAL



The ornate logo for Traveller's Tales was designed by artist Rodney Matthews. Jon and Andy were huge fans of his, which later led to Hammerhead designing a game around him called *Shadow Master*.

An interesting story lies with its marsupial character, originally destined to be the lead for *Haven: Call Of The King*. Although Activision said that it was a poor choice, Jon soon discovered that it bore an uncanny resemblance to Ratchet from the soon-to-be-released *Ratchet & Clank*, so much so that he bought their domain name and linked the TT website to it. Although it was quickly settled, Insomniac's platformer was a hit, while *Haven* flopped.

As much-loved as the logo and marsupial were, the decision to update it was a simple one. "We sponsored a car in the British Touring Car Championships with our logo on the door. It went whizzing by and you couldn't read it. I wanted a logo that I could read at speed. We messed around with the logos and came up with TT. Perhaps it would have been driven from growing up a little bit."



That was a very difficult transition, and that took quite a long time."

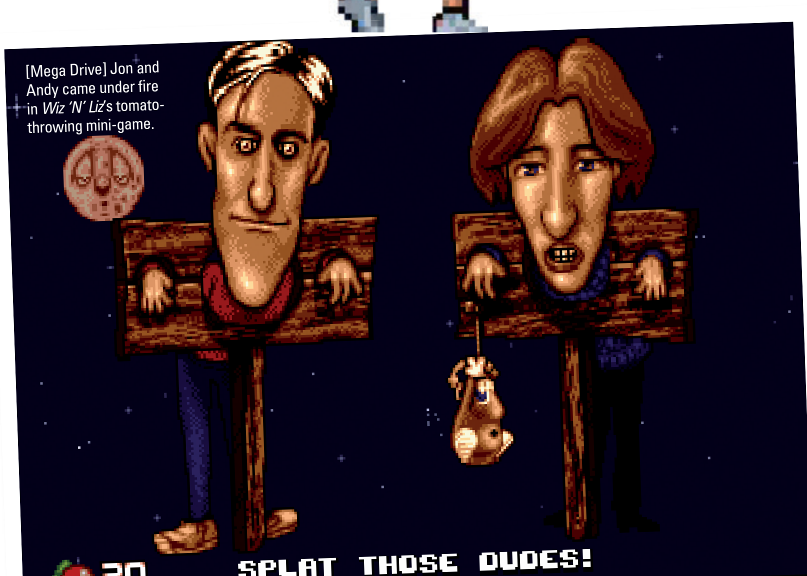
Knowing that he had to hang up his keyboard, Jon wanted to be directly involved in one final project, something he wanted to create since the Amiga days. Inspired by the *Mercenary* series, he wanted a space adventure with the same sense of scale, allowing you to explore ground-level dungeons all the way up to orbiting spaceships. But like *Puggsy* a decade earlier, *Haven: Call Of The King*'s slow burn failed to capture the player's attention: "I wanted to surprise people. But the problem is you have to start them in a cupboard for them to appreciate the scale. What we should have done was had a level in space and bust them down to planet level. It's all we needed to do. But we didn't. But that was hard. It was an original project with three years and a lot of learning."

Getting the title finished placed great stress on Jon and his marriage. Hoping to get it complete before the birth of his second son, it culminated in an intense period working 140-hour weeks. "That went on for four months solid. Just five hours a day to eat, sleep and argue," said Jon. "I felt the side effects of that, physically, and that took a while to come back again, to stop buzzing because you're so wired, directing everything." But true to the company's reputation, the game was finished on schedule, and he finally channelled his efforts into running the company full-time.



Building blocks

The next few years saw the company expand through a series of new studios and acquisitions. It opened a new studio in Oxford, which handled two *Crash Bandicoot* titles on the PS2, but the arrangement didn't work out. The distance between the two offices meant that Jon couldn't communicate ideas properly, meaning that they didn't come out as polished as they should.



[Mega Drive] Jon and Andy came under fire in *Wiz 'N' Liz*'s tomato-throwing mini-game.

SIX OF THE BEST



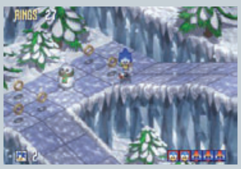
Puggsy [1993]
A puzzle-platformer where an alien tries to go home, its stages were built around a physics system with a whole library of objects that could be floated, thrown or stacked in order to progress. It was crammed with dozens of secrets to find.



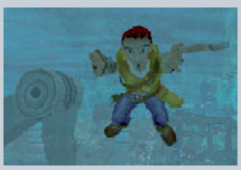
Mickey Mania [1994]
One of Disney's many excellent 16-bit platformers. Exploring Mickey's greatest hits paved the way for a whole range of environments and colour palettes. It also pushed the hardware to the limit, with rotating 3D towers and chase sequences.



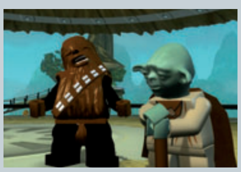
Toy Story [1996]
Not only was this movie tie-in a solid platformer, but it was almost as technically impressive as Pixar's film. Glossy visuals and a variety of play styles proved that Traveller's Tales truly knew its way around 16-bit hardware.



Sonic 3D Blast [1996]
Taking *Sonic* isometric was contentious, and the Mega Drive's D-pad made it a difficult transition. But the Saturn version, with enhanced visuals and music, refined level design, and compatibility with the 3D pad finally made it a blast.



Haven: Call Of The King [2002]
Jon Burton's dream project was a flawed endeavour, uncomfortably cramming racing and shooting elements in between its stages. But underneath its pacing issues was a genuinely charming platformer, with some wonderful touches.



Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga [2007]
This compilation of the *Lego Star Wars* releases is an irresistible package. Not only did it feature all six films, but HD visuals and online co-op play brought it to a new generation of systems.

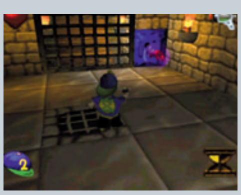
THREE TO AVOID



Bram Stoker's Dracula [1993]
The company's first licensed game was not a sign of things to come. While it looked good, practically everything else didn't sit right. Boss battles were predictable, weapons were pointless, enemies would wipe out your health in moments, and it didn't tie in to the film.



A Bug's Life [1998]
While technically proficient, this sterile title started life as a puzzle platformer, allowing you to use seeds to reach different areas. But Sony interfered and said that the puzzles were too complicated for younger gamers, and these core mechanics disappeared.



Rascal [1998]
Psygnosis's answer to *Super Mario 64*, this was a charming platformer with an impressive frame rate and excellent visuals, but it had crippling control issues that, at times, made it unplayable. The main character turned like a tank, and the poor camera only made it worse.





[PS2] The marsupial mascot in the company logo was originally destined for *Haven: Call Of The King*.



After offering its staff jobs in the main studio, the office was closed. Jon described it as a learning experience, and today the company successfully runs handheld studio TT Fusion a stone's throw away.

Traveller's Tales continued to produce more licensed products – *Bionicle* and *Chronicles Of Narnia* among them – but Jon was getting itchy feet. "I'd tended to get into these cycles, where something interesting would happen for three years, then I'd realise that we were just cranking out games." It was at this time that Lego took interest in the company. It offered the chance to develop a game based on a new toy line that was in development. Lego as a brand was flagging, and dedicating resources to it was a risk, but with a team free from *Haven*, Jon agreed to give it a go.

At the same time, Lego pitched *Lego Star Wars* to LucasArts, and in turn it was proposed to Traveller's Tales. The timing couldn't have been better: "I had sent a demo of *Haven* to the head of LucasArts, saying, 'Imagine this with *Star Wars* attached', but he left," recalled Jon. "I was desperate to make a *Star Wars* game, so we made the demo, and it worked."

Business deals elsewhere saw Lego shift the licence to Giant Interactive, which was to become the publisher, but Jon wasn't happy with the arrangement. "I said okay, but at the back of my mind I was a little bit narked that they hadn't said, 'We're a start-up, and we know there's some risk involved, so we'll give you some equity as a thank you for trusting us.'"

Six months later, Jon started discussions that led to Traveller's Tales acquiring Giant Interactive and the rights to Lego in 2004, with the creation of publishing arm TT Games. "That was our first self-published title. We did all the marketing and obviously it was the right one to back. It sold 7 million copies and we got all the publishing royalties. That had set us up then."

Although the company continued to work on other licences, it was apparent that this franchise was a winner. After a number of *Lego* releases and several BAFTAs, Jon wanted a fresh challenge. He sold TT Games to Time Warner in 2007, which he describes as a perfect fit – a strong library of licences, similar ideals, and the fact that Warner had little knowledge of the industry meant that it wasn't going to interfere with development. It would also allow Jon to look into films further down the line, which he has a passion and clear skill for between his handling of licences and running of award-winning side company TT Animation.

Having recently renewed the Lego licence until 2016, and with Warner working on a Lego film that the studio might have direct involvement in, Traveller's Tales has a secure future and remains one of the few publishers to deal extensively in licensed products, especially those for younger audiences and families. As well as the respect and understanding for what it takes to deliver such products, Jon cites his core team, almost all of whom are still with the company, for its success over the years.

"People you work with for 20 years, you know they're safe pairs of hands," says Jon. "It absolutely helps that I've had a set of people – the heads of art, programming, design and animation – that are all still here. You get people coming and going, but we've rarely lost a key person." And between surviving numerous crunch periods and working with some of the world's biggest brands, Jon struggled to think of anything he would have done differently. And judging by the company's successes, we're inclined to agree.


SCORE 6545

Chickin Chase

MORE THAN JUST A PECK ON THE CHEEK

RETROREVIVAL



» CPC
» FIREBIRD
» 1985

In the Eighties, it seemed as if any idea, vocation or scenario could be transformed into a videogame, no matter how bizarre or unnecessary. Take *Chickin Chase* for instance, a quirky arcade-style budget title by Firebird Software that saw you play a henpecked cockerel trying to appease his stroppy wife, sow his seeds and protect his fledglings from an inexorable number of creatures great and small (mainly small).

Set inside a colourful henhouse, you had to manage the needs of your nymphomaniac chicken spouse by visiting her chamber and engaging in a spot of how's yer father. This is tactfully handled in the game, and you don't actually see the feathered fornicators doing it – it's just insinuated behind closed doors.

Once fertilised, the hen will emerge from her boudoir ready to drop some sprogs into the nests at the very top of the coop, and this is where the second part of your mission comes into play. As you wait for them to hatch, the eggs must be protected from ravenous, ornery critters by hitting the space bar to actuate a pecking attack.

And that's not all. On top of all this, you also had to ensure that there is always an egg waiting to hatch in the coop – if the production line comes to a halt, a baby chick will sound the alarm and the chicken will emerge quite narked and beat you around the head with something that looks like a bit like a purple sex aid (seriously). Anyway, the game basically becomes a kind of humorous juggling act between perpetual procreating and diligent doorman, and the sporadic nature of the enemy creatures means you will certainly have your work cut out – who would have thought that the life of a cockerel would be so demanding, eh?

So there you have it. When your kids start asking you those inevitable questions about the birds and bees and your brain starts getting clammy, save yourself from any awkwardness by firing up *Chickin Chase* and letting Firebird Software do all the work. *



Vib-Ribbon

A big-eyed bouncing rabbit and a game that let you literally play your CD collection. Paul Drury asks Masaya Matsuura all about his thing on a string

We want to clear this up at the start. As much as we adore the minimalism of *Vib-Ribbon,* we wonder what caused the man who had introduced the PlayStation generation to the candy-coloured, Day-Glo worlds of *PaRappa The Rapper* and *UmJammer Lammy* to decide to shoot his next creature feature in black and white?

Masaya Matsuura leans back on his chair and smiles broadly. "Actually, we did try to create a colourful world at first but, you know, if you have fish and chips every day, you want to try other dishes."

The very English analogy is a sweet touch. We are sat in plush offices overlooking Nottingham's grand Council House, grabbing an hour with Matsuura-san before he delivers his keynote speech as part of the annual GameCity festival. We are joined by NanaOn-Sha's director of development Dewi Tanner, who helps with the occasional bit of translation, though Matsuura's command of our language demonstrates his long interest in Western culture. And we're here to discover the tale behind the cult PSone title *Vib-Ribbon*.

In the late Nineties, when everyone was going mad for polygons and the third dimension, along skipped a resolutely 2D rabbit balanced on a wobbly tightrope. Matsuura might have already given us rapping dogs and guitar-wielding sheep, but this bug-eyed bunny still felt out of step with the times. If the bizarre lead character and esoteric rhythm-action gameplay wasn't enough, he'd gone and done it all with vector graphics. Was this due to a misspent youth playing *Asteroids* in the arcades of Akihabara, perhaps?

"No, actually," laughs Matsuura, "but I really love vector graphics. When I started to make my own music, everything went to the computer from analogue media, analogue waves. I was so excited to have friends who tried to create something using computers. One of them, who had a big impact on me, was part of the computer graphics team. At that time, computer graphics didn't have texture. It was wireframe. I really liked wireframe and this was the reason for *Vib-Ribbon*."

The distinct visual style came later, though. The roots of the rhythmic rabbit began shortly after the completion of *PaRappa The Rapper* in 1996, when Matsuura and his NanaOn-Sha development team were made a rather unusual proposition. "The game began as an advertisement for the Mercedes-Benz A-Class car," he explains. "They wanted to appeal to a younger audience in Japan, so they contacted Sony about using a game to promote the car. We were approached to take on the project. The very first prototype was not a wireframe, just a regular polygon-based car bumping along a road according to the audio. But it was a living car. The headlights were the eyes!"

Even at this early stage, the idea of using an external audio source to not



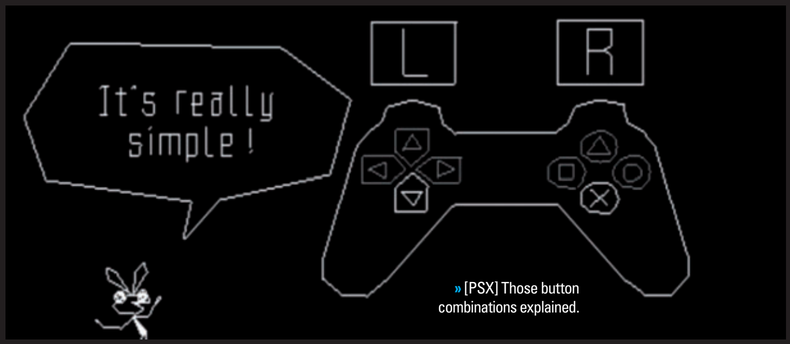
» [PSX] Timing is everything in *Vib-Ribbon*. Performing a string of loop-de-loops is especially satisfying.

only provide a soundtrack but to actually trigger actions in the game was already in place. However, what Matsuura had in mind was not what he was seeing on screen. "Duh, duh, duh, duh," he puffs, moving his hand up and down to indicate the repetitive plod of that initial demo. "I really hated that first system! It was very simple. It is easy to synchronise only the bass drum but usually music contains various types of frequencies together. All the things happening on the road were the same type of things. It really didn't feel like it was synchronised with the audio."

NanaOn-Sha wasn't the only one facing technical difficulties. The mighty Mercedes-Benz also had to return to the drawing board after a serious blow to its launch plans. "The A-Class car had trouble at that time from strong winds coming from the side and it falling over," says Matsuura, raising his eyebrows. "That is a design problem that had to be fixed! So now our platform is gone and we almost gave up the project."

Fortunately, enough young team members encouraged Matsuura to persevere with the idea of utilising external audio, and one particularly talented programmer made a crucial breakthrough. "He discovered how to analyse CD audio using the PlayStation hardware," he explains. "Kind of a security hole in the PlayStation system. I think maybe the system designer for Sony was very upset!"

> **"We always thought Vibri was a ballerina, dancing in the street, or a figure skater"**
>
> MATSUURA ON HIS GRACEFUL HEROINE



» [PSX] Those button combinations explained.

This technical innovation was accompanied by a conceptual one. The headlights of the Mercedes morphed into the wide eyes of a hyperactive rabbit, and the road became the ribbon that she was dancing along. Thus Vibri, the heroine of this most inventive of music games, was born, yet her form was anything but stable. Follow the rhythm correctly and she becomes a princess, but mistime her steps and she devolves into a frog and then a lowly worm, wiggling along the wire. There's almost a fairytale quality to the set of transformations.

"We always thought she was a ballerina, dancing in the street, or a figure skater," muses Matsuura. "By becoming a frog and the way it moved, we wanted to make you feel bad when devolving and elated when evolving."

There is certainly something euphoric when Vibri successfully negotiates 20 obstacles without tripping up and becomes the angelic Super-Vibri, yet that could be a tricky task. The game uses four basic shapes – square, circle,





IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** SONY
- » **DEVELOPER:** NANAON-SHA
- » **RELEASED:** 1999
- » **GENRE:** RHYTHM ACTION
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £15 (PAL)

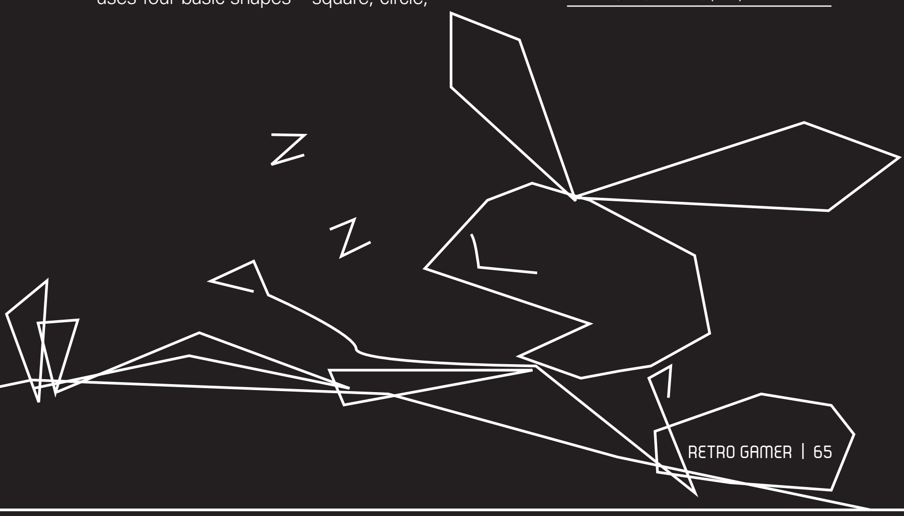
WHAT'S THE FREQUENCY, ALEX?

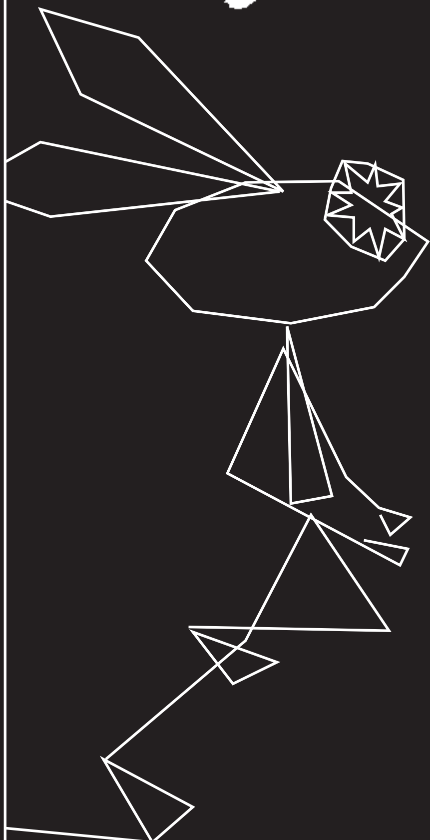


» The happy couple: Matsuura and Vibri.

Matsuura has been dubbed the father of rhythm-action games and Alex Rigopulos, head of Harmonix, the home of *Rock Band*, has a personal debt of gratitude to him.

"He came to me before they did *Frequency*," says Matsuura, "and he had a very smart system. They used a joystick for controlling the audio. How you moved it could change the notes and the frequency but for me, it sounded too random. I said to him something very simple: think about the game. This is a very interesting experimental system but maybe the audience needs play, excitement, results and be satisfied by playing the game. Focus on these things for your content." Sound advice. We wonder if he has any predictions for future developments in the field. "I think we have great possibilities for game-based music and music-based games. I really want to explore different categories of music– for example, serious classical music. I'd love to conduct the London Philharmonic!"





triangle and a wiggly line – which correspond to the left and right shoulder buttons, down on the D-pad and X respectively. Hit the correct button as you approach the shape and Vibri gracefully vaults it. Get it wrong or mess up your timing and she blunders through it, ending your streak with a painful electric shock. Too many mistakes and you descend the evolutionary scale until the song abruptly ends in failure.

Sounds simple? It certainly is at first, and the use of only four inputs at a time when buttons were beginning to proliferate across joypads everywhere gives the game a charming retro feel, which nicely complements the old-school visuals. However, soon you'll be faced with weirdly shaped obstacles that combine two of the basic pieces in one and require some dextrous finger work to negotiate.

"Those combined shapes are designed in a very intuitive way," explains Matsuura. "Triangle and square – it's easy to combine these in the brain with the two buttons. That was important to us. I wanted a game that used both hands together. My private reason is that I'm very addicted to playing drums and to play them well, you need to combine the right and left hand to fit the rhythm."

Vib-Ribbon can be an almost therapeutic experience when eyes and fingers are working in harmony, but as the speed and intricacy of the courses increases, it can become a dissonant nightmare. Things become even more challenging when your view of the ribbon swirls to a new viewpoint mid-song and, if that wasn't enough, the pieces start to float back and forth, changing the order in which they must be traversed in brain-addling fashion.

"That was a bug!" laughs Matsuura. "I had an old friend, a recording engineer who had worked with my old band Psy-S, who now worked for Sony on music. After *PaRappa*, Sony assigned him to the project and he helped write the script. He found the bug that made the obstacles move from side to side… and the programmer really liked that! He said we should keep it."

Now, if *Vib-Ribbon* danced to a different drum in terms of game design, what really made it unique was that you could too. Once the game was loaded, you could insert any CD from your collection and the tunes became not only the backing track, but the music was actually used to create a



» An exclusive glimpse of NanaOn-Sha's aborted Mercedes-Benz project that evolved into *Vib-Ribbon*.





» Matsuura plays *Rhyme Rider Kerorican* on the WonderSwan while your correspondent goes weak at the knees.



» [PSX] *Vib-Ribbon* was released in Europe but not North America. Suckers.

GOOD VIBRATIONS

Though not direct sequels, Matsuura and his team have created two spiritual successors to Vib-Ribbon, though neither got a release outside Japan

Mojib-Ribbon – PS2 (2003)



"The same concept as *Vib-Ribbon* but using text files. At that time, the PS2 was trying to be net-oriented. Our focus was a simple text message, which would be exchangeable online. We wanted to carry it into the game. Next, we found a speech synthesizer developed by a Japanese phone company, and we hooked it to a PS2. We worked with the engineer for almost two years so if you input a text file it would rap the rhythm. We made kind of a rap-thesizer!"

Vib-Ripple – PS2 (2004)

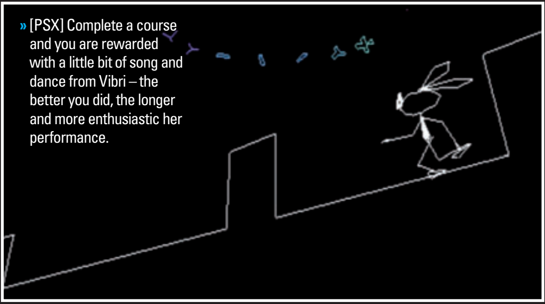


"At that time in Japan, everyone was exchanging pictures on their phones. We made the picture the ring of a trampoline. The system analyses areas of the same colour and if the shape looks like, for example, a mountain, like a triangle shape, the system will assign a mountain to that part and if you keep jumping on it, a mountain will come out! If you are successful you get the stamp of a mountain and you can use it to decorate the picture and send it back from your mobile."





» Masaya Matsuura (left) and Dewi Tanner at Nottingham's GameCity festival in 2009.



» [PSX] Complete a course and you are rewarded with a little bit of song and dance from Vibri – the better you did, the longer and more enthusiastic her performance.

new course layout. Suddenly you could skip along to Sonic Youth, race the ribbon to Ravel, or vibrate to The Verve. The use of external audio in such an innovative way showed that Matsuura was definitely looking to the future. Eight seconds into the future, to be precise.

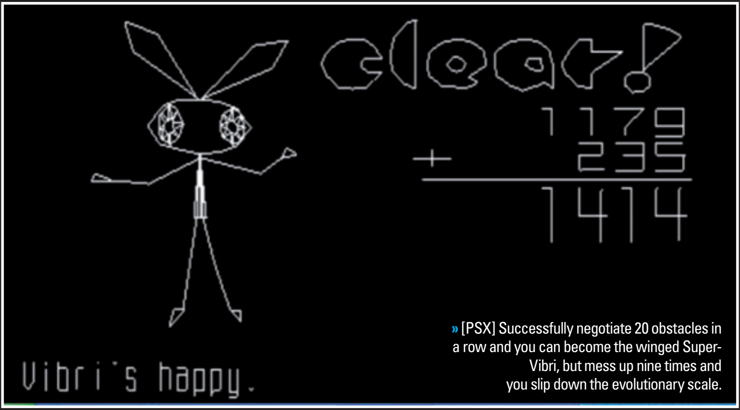
"The system looks eight seconds ahead of what you are listening to and calculates what is going to happen," he explains. "We created a 'window' to quantify the audio and if something interesting happens in this time, we pick it. It is about finding the most interesting frequency changes. If we see breaks or louder parts, we pick them and they become some sort of obstacle. The table is a very complicated one."

Matsuura spent three weeks writing this 'script', deciding how frequently the system would select something interesting to convert into a shape and searching for the optimum window size. The process also required experimenting with various musical genres, to often-surprising effect. "We had lots of CDs on our desks and we would try each one. I remember one day I played with Brian Eno. No pieces came out…"

Whether you were into ambient soundscapes, dub reggae or speed metal, half the fun was seeing how your music of choice would be rendered. While you were rewarded with a score at the end of a level, your tally was represented by swirling symbols, signifying a move away from traditional score-chasing. You could argue that *Vib-Ribbon* wasn't so much a game as another way to enjoy music, which Matsuura was well aware of.

"We had already had success with *PaRappa*, which was, of course, a hip-hop game. I was really satisfied that many people love *PaRappa*, but I was so surprised that many others didn't! So I decided to make a sequel, *UmJammer Lammy*, using rock music. I'm very happy to have two successful titles at that time but I hadn't had the experience of the audience loving both. It was a big thing for me. Someone comes, for example, and says that they really like *PaRappa* and another says that they really like *Lammy*, but nobody says both! It was kind of expected, I suppose, but it gave me a complex feeling, so I decided to make a music game where the user can choose their own tracks."

"I remember playing Vib-Ribbon with a Brian Eno CD. No pieces came out" AIRPORT MUSIC ISN'T GAMING MUSIC…



» [PSX] Successfully negotiate 20 obstacles in a row and you can become the winged Super-Vibri, but mess up nine times and you slip down the evolutionary scale.

Thus Matsuura worked out how to please everyone, and his PSone swansong gave us a truly individual experience. One of the joys is tackling a cherished tune that throws up a monumentally difficult course and somehow finishing it, as if your fingers are responding to the madness without recourse to your befuddled brain. You feel at one with the music. For us, it was Motörhead's *Ace Of Spades* that first pushed us into the zone.

"Yes, I know that feeling," Matsuura nods. "You know about phantom pain? When you have lost a limb but still feel pain, even when it is not there? That is pain, but games are fun. You might not be plugged in with a cable to your console, but you feel like you have a connection. Let's call it phantom fun!"

We all laugh at that. As Matsuura and his entourage prepare to meet their public, we just have time to ask whether Vibri might one day return. They exchange some furtive glances.

"There is no clear answer," says Tanner. "We really want to keep making *Vib-Ribbon* types of games. With Vibri and to some extent *PaRappa*, it depends on how much call there is from customers. If we start seeing more and more calls for these games then who knows…"

"It is still possible," adds Matsuura. "I think about it every day! It will never disappear from my brain."

Time to raise your voices in unison.

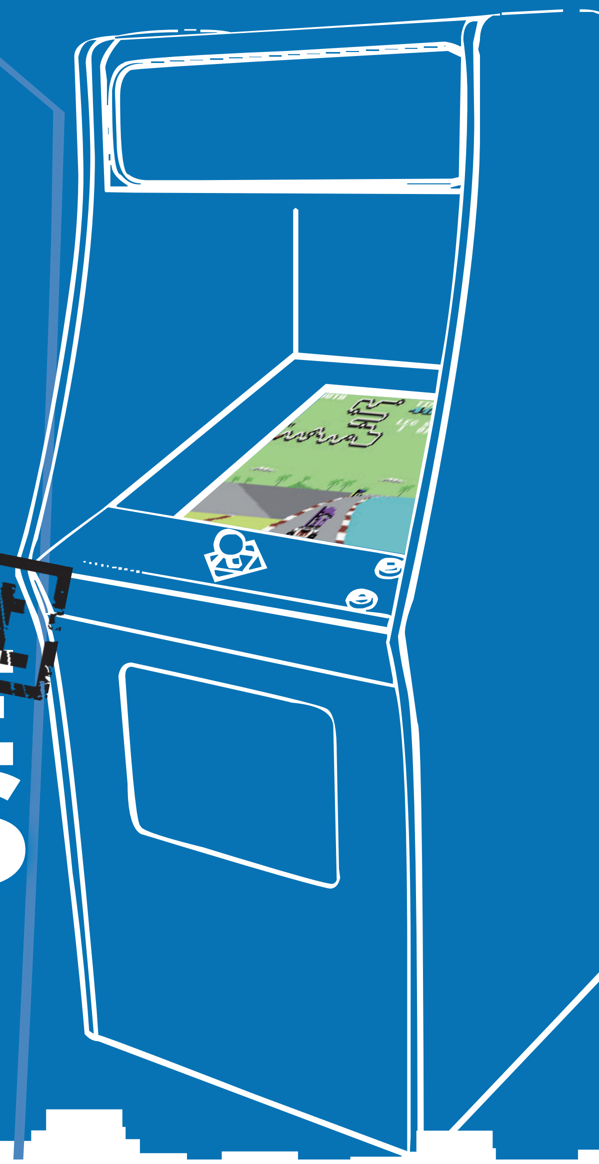


DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

PARAPPA THE RAPPER
SYSTEM: PSONE
YEAR: 1996

RHYME RIDER KERORICAN
SYSTEM: WONDERSWAN
YEAR: 2000

MAJOR MINOR'S MAJESTIC MARCH (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: WII
YEAR: 2008

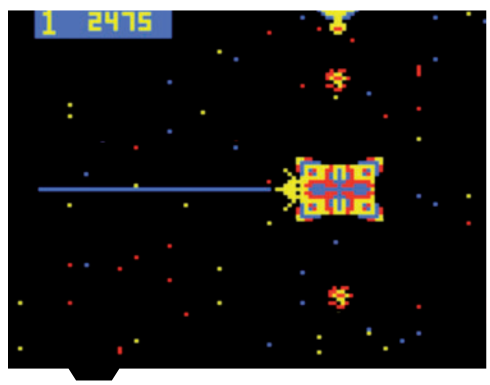


The 25 8-bit Best Arcade Conversions of All Time

STUART CAMPBELL'S ENDLESS QUEST FOR DEFINITIVE TRUTH LEADS HIM INTO DEEP WATERS

Man, this was a bad idea. Where do you even start on trying to define the best 8-bit arcade conversions of all time from out of the thousands and thousands of contenders? What are the criteria? Do you include unofficial ports, or only licensed ones? Do you take the quality of the original game into account, or only the faithfulness of the conversion? Is it fair to expect machines like the Spectrum to compete with more powerful hardware like the NES, and should you make allowances? Should you include different ports of the same game? What about modern releases on old hardware? And what do you do about the nominally 8-bit PC Engine, which, if included, would take up most of the top 25 by itself? (Answer: you don't include it, because it's an at least partly 16-bit system. Phew, that was close.)

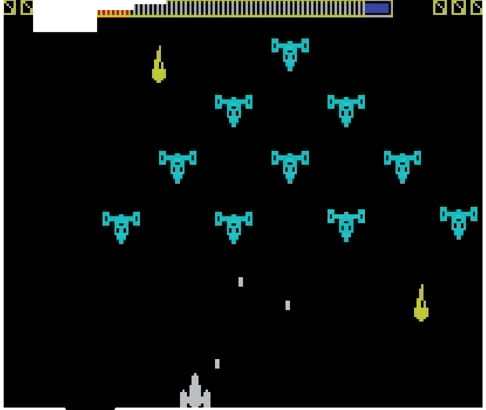
In the end, what you have to do is focus on games that FEEL like playing their arcade counterparts, even if they've got primitive graphics or technical inaccuracies. That way you end up with this list, and only a slight headache.



Space Fortress

FORMAT: BALLY ASTROCADE

25 **The Astrocade was** an early peer of the Atari VCS, but was somewhat less successful. However, its tiny catalogue – barely 30 games – did contain an arcade port that knocked almost anything on the VCS into a cocked hat for accuracy and feel. Weirdly, although Bally (via Midway) actually owned the arcade game in question (*Space Zap*), this isn't an official conversion, but it's identical in pretty much every way, and is probably the most insanely fast and frantic videogame of its entire era. (If you can't get hold of an Astrocade – and you probably can't – *Cosmic Zap* on the Dragon 32 is almost as good.)



Starclash

FORMAT: SPECTRUM

24 This early game from Derek Brewster, who would go on to make *Jasper* and *Codename MAT*, is an unbilled port of Gremlin/Sega's 1980 hit *Astro Fighter*. It's a faithful copy of an interesting and brutal game, and for many years was the Speccy's most authentic coin-op port. It's a tragedy that Brewster didn't try his hand at the brilliant follow-up, *Astro Blaster*.



Kung Fu Master

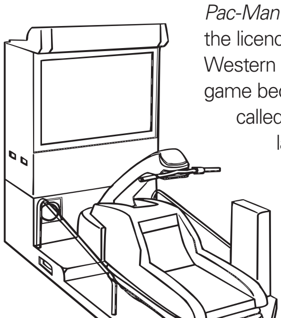
FORMAT: ATARI VCS

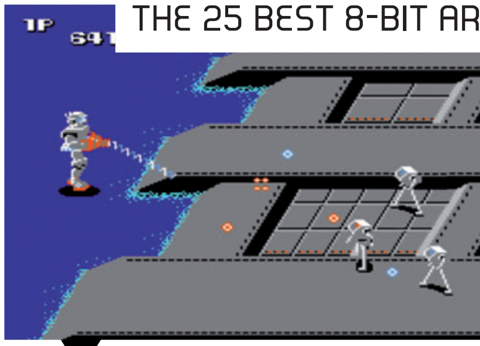
23 Most arcade games that were ported to the VCS underwent a pretty savage feature-stripping in order to run on the primitive hardware, but this stunning effort of compression deserves recognition. Activision generally got more out of the VCS than anyone else, and even by its standards *Kung Fu Master* looks better than most VCS games – it also looks a lot better than the Spectrum port – and includes almost every element of the coin-op, even down to squeezing two attack moves into a one-button joystick. Unlike many VCS ports, it really feels like the game that it's meant to represent.

Jelly Monsters

FORMAT: VIC-20

22 Talking about primitive hardware, it doesn't get a lot more Neanderthal than the VIC-20. But in the right hands, Commodore's elderly predecessor to the C64 could still do a very serviceable impression of an arcade machine. The highly accomplished *Jelly Monsters* was actually programmed by HAL Laboratories as the official *Pac-Man* port in Japan, where it had the licence. Atari protested about a Western release, so over here the game became an unofficial clone called *Jelly Monsters*. Atarisoft's later official VIC *Pac-Man* was astonishingly bad.

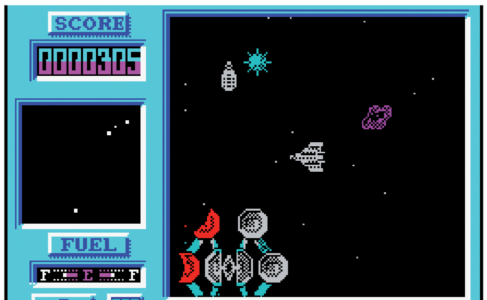




Mag Max

FORMAT: NES

21 Sometimes there's no substitute for a bit of processor grunt. The Speccy, C64 and Amstrad versions of this brilliant, obscure yet oddly widely ported Nichibutsu coin-op – think *Xevious*, but on the ground in a giant robot – were all pretty hideous in one way or another and don't play much like the arcade, but the NES conversion does, which helps it pull off the clever illusion of seeming much more like the coin-op than it actually is.

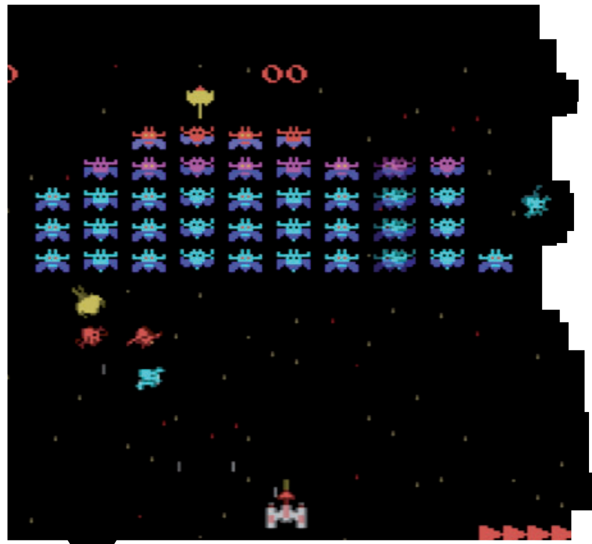


Bosconian '87

FORMAT: SPECTRUM

20 If we're talking about obscure, though, this one wins the prize. The box claims it to be an "Official Namco Arcade License", but in several years of looking we've never been able to track down any record of a *Bosconian '87* arcade game. The game is, in fact, a modestly updated version of the original *Bosconian*, with a couple of new gameplay features and a fantastic 128K soundtrack. It's worth playing just for the jaunty between-levels jingle.





Galaxian

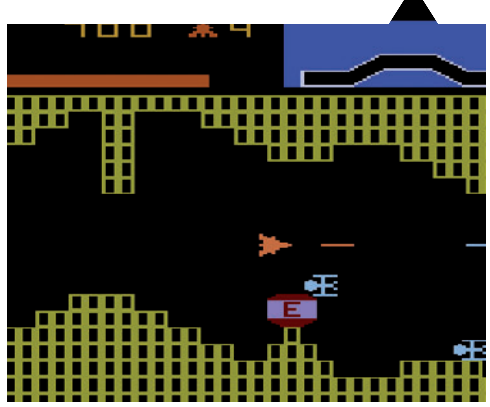
FORMAT: COLECOVISION

19 It took a surprisingly long time – almost half a decade – for there to be a really accurate home version of *Galaxian*, considering that it's one of the oldest and simplest arcade games in existence. What's extra strange about the almost-flawless Coleco port, though – apart from the fact that Atari was happy to license its IP to its bitter console rival – is how dramatically, unrecognisably better than the MSX version it is, despite the Coleco and MSX hardware being close to identical.

Vanguard

FORMAT: ATARI 5200

18 Special consideration was awarded in this feature to conversions that had particularly tricky control issues to surmount, and *Vanguard* falls squarely into that category. SNK's inventive and characterful *Scramble* derivative from 1981 used four fire buttons to shoot in all four compass directions, but the 5200 version had to make do with just one. The fact that it still managed to play like a very good approximation of its arcade big brother, capturing every section of the coin-op accurately and keeping the difficulty balanced, was testament to some loving conversion work.



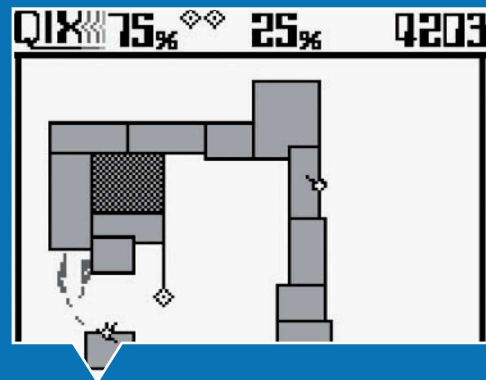




The Pit

■ **FORMAT:** C64

14 The VIC-20's second-best coin-op conversion was probably a rather splendid unofficial rendition of Centuri's fantastic and influential 1982 *Gran Turismo* predecessor *The Pit*, which alert readers will recall from the 'Families Reunited' feature way back in **RG** 51, but it was trumped when Hesware made an even better one for the C64. Its version, also flagrantly appropriating the arcade game's title wholesale, is a near-perfect clone.



Qix

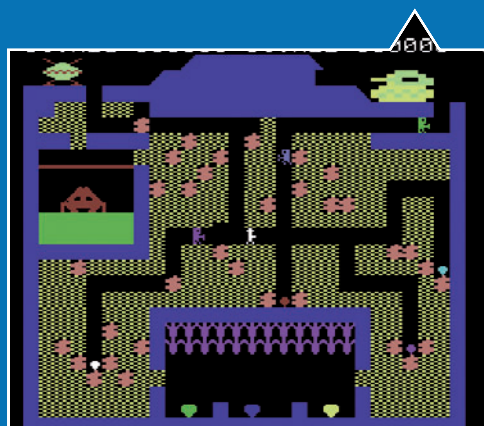
■ **FORMAT:** GAME BOY

13 There aren't many arcade games with visuals perfectly suited to the faint, blurry screen of the original mono Game Boy, but Taito's combat version of Etch-A-Sketch sits proudly at the head of the list. What's already a tense and claustrophobic game works even better squeezed down into the GB's little display, with the extra difficulty compensated by a speed reduction that makes it more tactical, tempting you with a chance of boxing the Qix into one per cent of the play area for maximum bonus.

Sub Track

■ **FORMAT:** SPECTRUM

17 Another feature that helped win a game inclusion in the feature was if it not only recreated an arcade game, but also added new options to the home version. *Sub Track* doesn't content itself with just being an excellent clone of Gremlin's atmospheric and absorbing 1977 hunter-killer sim *Depthcharge*, as it also lets players customise the game for speed and difficulty, and adds a twist in the form of a red nuclear sub, which must not be destroyed. Crank everything up and you get a game that's about five times as intense, but still completely true to its parent.



S.T.U.N. Runner

■ **FORMAT:** LYNX

12 At the opposite end of the handheld spectrum lies the Lynx's frankly astounding version of Atari's own high-tech 3D coin-op *S.T.U.N. Runner*, released almost a decade after *Qix* but replicated with incredible verity on the company's ill-fated portable. Phenomenally fast and complete, and far superior to the versions on more grown-up machines like the Amiga, the Lynx game is even more playable than the port on *Midway Arcade Treasures 3* for the Xbox.

Scramble

■ **FORMAT:** VECTREX

16 Speaking of *Scramble*, as we were a moment ago, it's amazing that such a seminal game – the grandfather of the *Gradius* series, and almost all other horizontal scrolling shooters – went over 20 years with only one official home port, and even weirder that the one it got was for MB's vector-graphics console, the Vectrex. This is such an authentic port, though, that after a few minutes you stop even noticing the radical new look – it helps if you take off the nasty plastic colour overlay – and forget that *Scramble* ever looked any other way.







Robotron

■ **FORMAT:** SPECTRUM

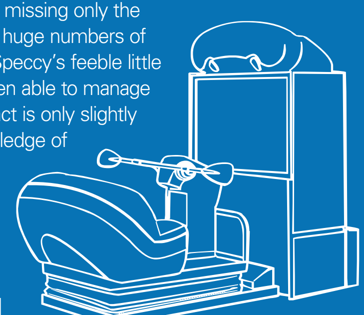
11 The Lynx also played host to a pretty decent version of *Robotron* – a game that has been generally served surprisingly well by home conversions, despite the seeming difficulty of managing the twin-stick controls – but the prize has to go to the never-released Speccy port. Based on code that Atari 'liberated' from a *Robotron* derivative called *Wild West Hero*, and missing only the evil Tanks, it shunts around huge numbers of sprites at speeds that the Speccy's feeble little CPU should never have been able to manage in a translation whose impact is only slightly lessened by the prior knowledge of *Wild West Hero*.

Crossbow

■ **FORMAT:** ATARI 7800

15 The 7800 was a pretty big flop, and ended up with a catalogue of only about 55 games in total, but if you bought it hoping to get some cool home ports of arcade games then the chances are you were pretty happy. A disproportionate number of the tiny game library were very decent coin-op conversions, and *Crossbow* – a little-known Exidy lightgun game – was probably both the most unusual and the best. The gun-to-joypad translation was very well-judged, and actually arguably made the game easier and more enjoyable than its arcade parent.







Popeye

FORMAT: NES

10 ***Popeye* is a** very strange case. A really good four-screen platform game that's a contemporary of *Donkey Kong*, which was released only a year earlier, it never gets any credit in videogame history. This is despite it having been ported to numerous formats, including the VCS, 5200, Intellivision, ColecoVision, C64, and even an aborted Spectrum ROM-cart version, which recently surfaced. Nintendo has seemingly disowned it, farming out the current rights to Namco, which has made an excellent mobile phone version. But the NES version is a delight, based on the rare, friendlier 'Revision F' version of the coin-op, with an extra, more difficult mode also available for the hardcore.

R-Type

FORMAT: SEGA MASTER SYSTEM

9 **Bob Pape's astonishing** Spectrum version of *R-Type* is rightly lauded as an incredible technical feat, but while it's hugely impressive and a great game in its own right, it doesn't actually feel all that much like *R-Type*. This does. The little SMS is straining every sinew to the absolute limit to capture Irem's legendary coin-op, and it shows, especially on Level 2, which is a bit of an eyesore even before the snakes arrive, but capture it it does. It looks like the arcade game, it sounds like it, it plays almost identically, and it even manages to squeeze in a whole extra secret bonus stage.

Buggy Boy

FORMAT: C64

8 **It's easy to** forget that there used to be a time in videogaming when 3D into-the-screen racers that moved at a halfway-decent pace were as rare as bears wearing diamond earrings. But the fantastic C64 version of *Buggy Boy* was one such beast, and it makes you wonder why publishers employed other coders to produce atrocities like the machine's version of *OutRun* when it could have been done this well. Lacking the awesomely gigantic sprite of the Speccy version but making up for it in speed and smoothness, this is a great port of a very likeable arcade game. Indeed, with MAME emulation still a bit of a mess, the C64 conversion is the best available way to play *Buggy Boy*.

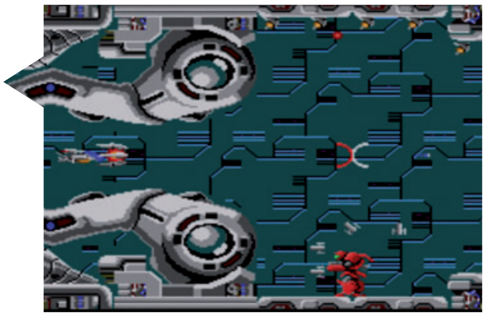




Renegade

FORMAT: SPECTRUM 128

7 **Speccy *Renegade* makes** the top ten not because it's a super-accurate port of the coin-op, but because it's so much *better* than it. In the arcades, *Renegade* is actually a pretty bad game, a mediocre beat-'em-up with messed-up controls that leave it borderline unplayable. But on the Spectrum it's one of the grittiest fighting games ever, an unforgiving test of careful strategy rather than just wading in dumbly and somehow managing to punch four people at once, à la *Golden Axe* or *Final Fight*. Double-teaming, knees to the groin, punching unconscious people in the head, and throwing youths to their deaths on railway tracks – it's all in here, and you can only do it in the home version.





Space Invaders

FORMAT: ATARI VCS, HACK VERSION

6 **VCS *Invaders* merits** inclusion in its own right for bringing a pretty faithful version of the arcade behemoth home and expanding it with over 100 interesting variations, but this entry also serves as a token representation for the work that wholly admirable but totally inexplicable people do on hacking, rewriting, or even building from scratch old games for even older hardware. Nobody knows why Atari elected to make VCS *Space Invaders* out of yellow octopuses instead of white arcade-style aliens, but now you can enjoy authentic *Invaders* gameplay with all the variations and authentic graphics.



Planetoid

FORMAT: BBC MICRO

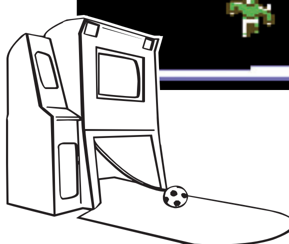
5 **The BBC was** famous for the quality of some of its arcade conversions, most notably the ones by Acornsoft and Superior Software, but not all of them stand up well today. (*Rocket Raid* feels horribly wrong, for example, and the inaccuracy of the maze in *Snapper* really sticks out.) *Planetoid*, however, is still terrific. The loving copy of *Defender* controls beautifully, and it has to if you're going to have a chance of dealing with the uncompromising blizzard of enemies trying to make off with your poor exposed humanoids. *Planetoid* does, however, cut the harassed player some slack by having the Landers drag kidnapped humes to the top of the screen for grisly mutation rather more slowly than the arcade game, making it a bit less overwhelming.

Smash TV

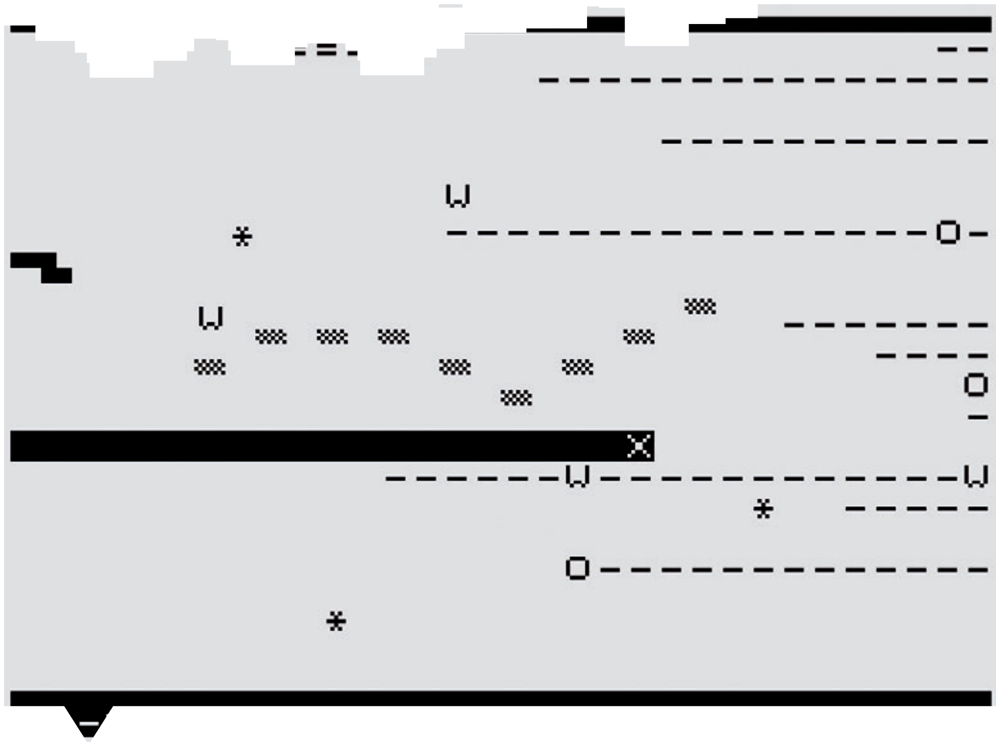
FORMAT: C64

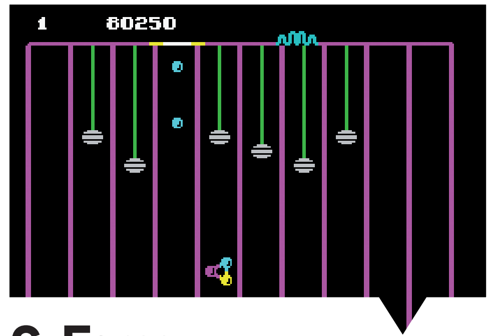
4 **The arcade technology** of 1990 should have been far beyond what the C64 was able to contend with, but against all the odds, the old stager, in the hands of the ever-mercurial Ocean, produced a fantastic conversion of Williams' epic spiritual sequel to *Robotron*. More playable than the Amiga and ST ports and more accurate than the Speccy's decent-but-different effort, C64 *Smash TV* features pretty much every element of the arcade machine, and despite the packed screen depicts them all at high speed and as smoothly as anyone could wish. It's an absolute tour de force of coding, and perhaps the old machine's last truly great release.











G-Force

FORMAT: SPECTRUM

2 **If you want** to play a fantastic *Tempest* game on the Spectrum, however – or the C64, though that version isn't as good – there's another choice, and it isn't the terrible official port by Electric Dreams. What you want is 1984's *G-Force*, by the excellently named Boris Baginski. (In fact, the game first appeared in Germany in 1983 simply under the name *Tempest*, but was renamed and sold in the UK under the new title.)

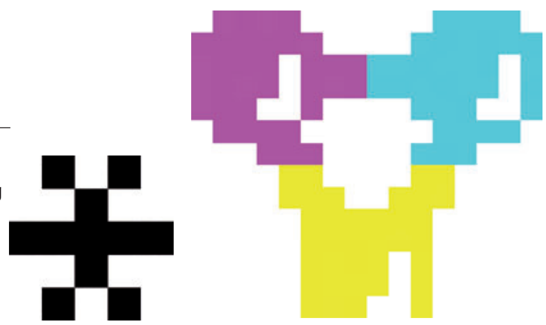
G-Force is a triumph of brilliant lateral thinking. Realising that the Speccy wasn't up to the task of displaying *Tempest*'s complex 3D vector webs, it simply unfolded and flattened them into a single overhead-view grid, then transposed everything else onto it. Flippers, Spikers, Tankers, Fuseballs and Pulsars all made it across, most of them behaving a lot like their coin-op counterparts – if sometimes a bit abstracted – but depicted in a single 2D plane that enabled the Speccy to display them in a pleasing and un-Speccyish electro-cartoon style, in lavish colour with no clashing. Despite the visual differences, though, the gameplay rhythms are uncannily *Tempest*-like. The *feel* of playing *G-Force* is closer to the arcade game that it seeks to mimic even than most of the other games in this list, which is why it makes the number two spot.

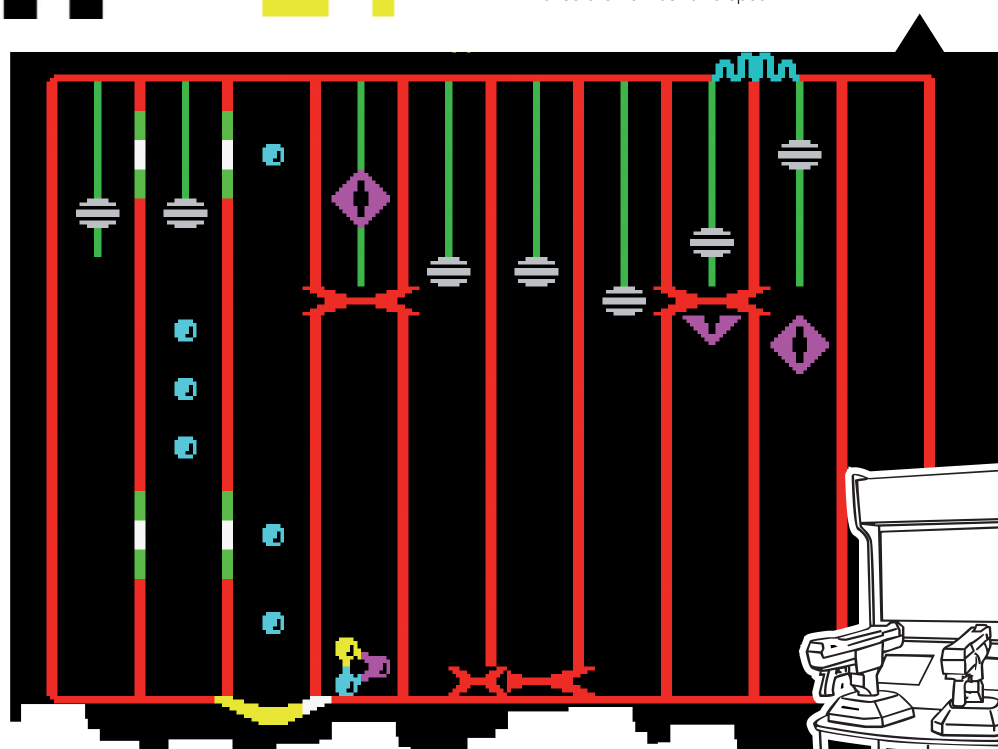
Tempest

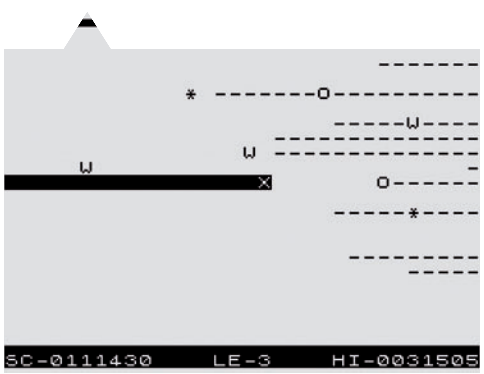
FORMAT: ZX81

3 ***Tempest* is a** game that's been badly treated at the hands of countless conversion teams working on relatively powerful hardware, so the chances of anyone cloning it with any sort of success on the ZX81 would surely have to be nil, right? But, in fact, this is perhaps the most incredible and unlikely piece of coin-op conversion in the history of gaming. Armed only with a handful of letters and punctuation marks, the mysterious SP Kelly worked around the machine's huge limitations and managed to come up with a game that superbly replicates the feel of Atari's overpowering vector-graphics coin-eating monster, and on the higher difficulty settings provides a remarkably similar gameplay experience that's every bit as frantic and terrifying.

Publisher Mikro-Gen later ported the game to the Spectrum, where with the added benefits of colour, sound and vastly higher graphical resolution it was completely rubbish, which just goes to show that sometimes videogaming is all about the power of imagination as much as raw hardware specs.

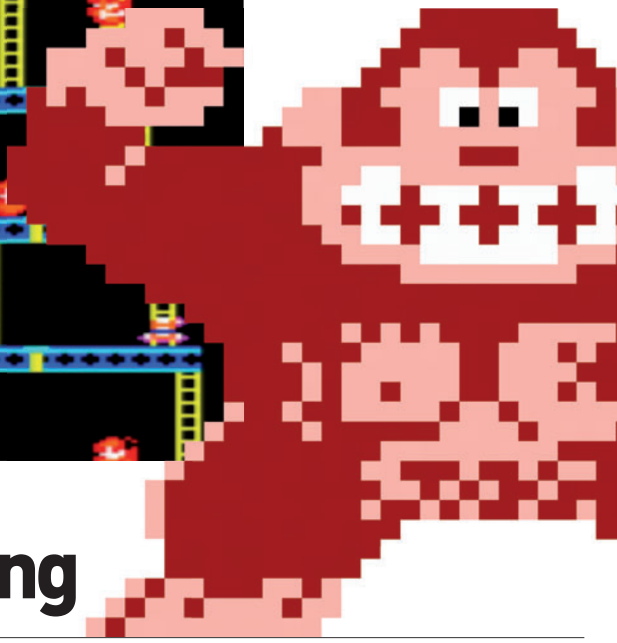


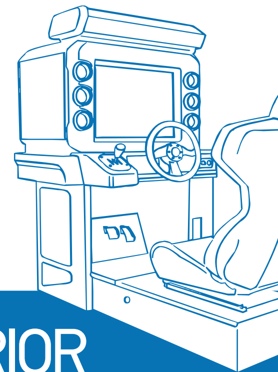












Donkey Kong

■ **FORMAT:** AMSTRAD CPC

1 When you're looking for the absolute best arcade conversion of all time, though, you can't ask for more than a port of one of the most bona-fide classic coin-ops in history, converted so perfectly that if you stuck it in a cabinet and put it in an arcade you could easily mistake it for the real thing.

Amazingly, despite *Donkey Kong* only having a modest four single-screen levels, every official port until Ocean picked up the licence in 1986 had failed to include them all. The ColecoVision, Atari 7800 and even the NES were feeble three-stage replicas for no obvious reason – all three consoles happily hosted far bigger games – but Ocean finally converted the whole game, including the cement-factory stage.

The Spectrum, C64 and MSX versions were all accomplished efforts – though the Speccy used a needlessly weird and wrong colour scheme – but the Amstrad CPC port is simply a league apart. Utilising a little-used screen mode in order to display the game in the authentic portrait orientation, Arcana Software Design meticulously replicated every aspect of arcade *Donkey Kong*. The levels were the same, the timings were the same, the cut-scenes were the same, and even the high-score screen retained the original slightly irritating name entry system. We went through CPC *Kong* in forensic detail with a fine-toothed comb, looking for ways in which it differed from the source material, and all we managed to come up with was that Mario is fatter. That's it.

And it plays as well as it looks. It's fast and smooth, with flawless control – you can even make Mario authentically jump backwards – and the difficulty ramps up as you cycle through the stages again in exactly the same ways as it does in the coin-op.

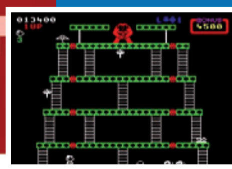
CPC *Donkey Kong* is, in every meaningful way and nearly all of the trivial ones too, a perfect conversion. It *is* the arcade game, in marginally chunkier graphics. It tramples all over ports for more powerful machines, even the ones created by the people who actually made *Donkey Kong* in the first place. It's everything it could possibly have been. It's the greatest 8-bit arcade conversion of all time!

> **"CPC Donkey Kong is, in every meaningful way, a perfect conversion"**

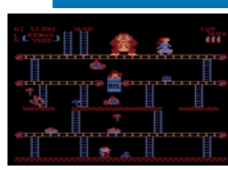




FIVE INFERIOR DONKEY KONG PORTS



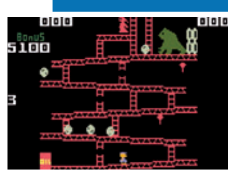
1 SPECTRUM
The Speccy version plays perfectly decently, but the developer used a weird and nasty colour scheme for some reason. Given the closeness of the Sinclair and CPC hardware, their respective versions of *Donkey Kong* are like chalk and cheese.



2 ATARI 800
Until the CPC game, this was the closest an official home *Donkey Kong* port came to including all the levels of the coin-op. All it's missing is the top bit of Round 1, but it's got the wonky US level ordering, and the way you can be killed by barrels on the girder above you really sucks.



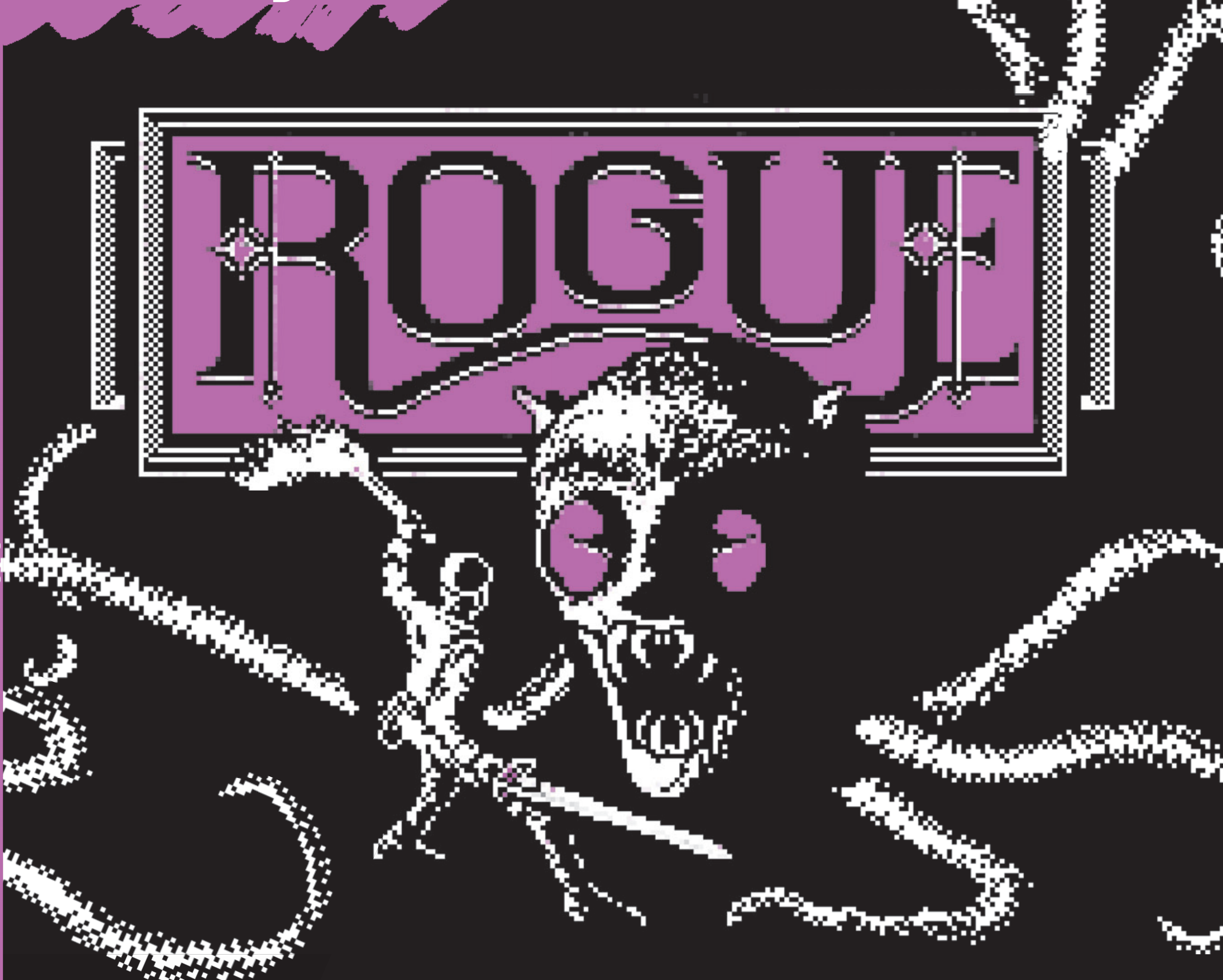
3 DRAGON 32
Despite being unofficial, Microdeal's *Donkey King* (later renamed *The King*) was overall the most authentic home *Donkey Kong* until the CPC port. It had the Dragon's hideous colour palette and the American level order, but all four levels were present and correct.



4 INTELLIVISION
Graphics far below what we expected from even the creaky old Intellivision completely underwhelmed, and the inclusion of only two stages and a Mario who jumped like an elephant full of helium on a trampoline were quite baffling.



5 BBC MICRO
The Beeb's famous clone *Killer Gorilla* is a very respectable effort in its own right, other than some dodgy patterns – particularly on the lift stage – but on a machine that was technically at least the Amstrad's equal, it trails an embarrassing distance behind in terms of quality.



There are times when the most compelling journeys come forth from the depths of the imagination. Glenn Wichman explains to Kim Wild the origins of the ASCII characters that managed to thrill and scare gamers in more ways than one

After years of laborious training at the fighter's guild, you have become a mighty warrior ready to embark on the next perilous challenge. To prove your worth to the Guildmasters, you have been sent to the Dungeons of Doom, equipped with the finest enchanted mace, a bow and quiver of arrows taken from a dragon's hoard, and are wearing the finest elf-crafted armour that money can buy. Upon entering the dungeon and venturing forth into the nearest room, you encounter a hobgoblin. Your weapon is ready. But so is the hobgoblin.

You hit the hobgoblin. The hobgoblin swings and hits you. You miss the hobgoblin. The hobgoblin scores a massive hit on you. You miss the hobgoblin. The hobgoblin injures you. You hit the hobgoblin. The hobgoblin hits you. Rest in peace. You have been killed by the hobgoblin.

It's a scene that many who have played *Rogue* or one of its imitations will have encountered.

Rogue is a punishing mistress, ready to capitalise on any little mistake and unforgiving in its demands. Yet its appeal is undeniable, luring you in with its charms and promises of hidden treasures and untold fortune, making it almost impossible to resist. Despite its tricky and infuriating nature, few can deny that *Rogue* has the capacity to inspire the most intrepid adventurer and has become a leading light within the computer game industry.

Created by Glenn Wichman and Michael Toy, the building blocks for *Rogue* would be conjured up at university in Santa Cruz. "Michael and I were both freshmen at Crown College at University of California Santa Cruz in fall

of '78," recalls Glenn. "Computers were still relatively novel in those days, and even at a science-centred college like Crown, there were only three computer terminals available, in a small storage room. I hadn't really used a computer before arriving, but I immediately got hooked. Michael was a computer hobbyist from his high school days; he and I were two of about a dozen people who spent most of their spare time using the computers. I got hooked on playing *Adventure*, but soon wanted to create my own *Adventure*-type game, so I started figuring out how to use BASIC. Michael saw what I was doing and helped teach me the ins and outs of programming, since I really didn't know what I was doing at the time. By 1980, Michael and I were sharing an apartment off-campus. We had created dozens of games by this point, including lots of text adventures. Michael got a hold of Ken Arnold's curses library, which allowed us to create programs that placed a character at a specific position on the terminal screen – before this package was developed, characters always appeared at the bottom and scrolled up as new characters were printed. We were using it to create simple graphical games like *Snake*, and then discussed whether it would be possible to create a graphical adventure game."

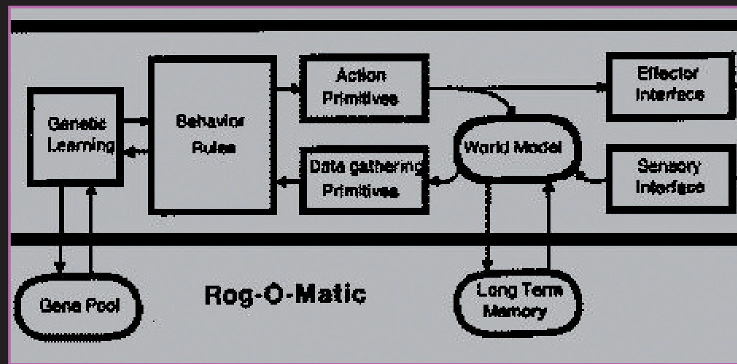
Heavily inspired by the tabletop game *Dungeons & Dragons* by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson – "[The] earliest versions used monsters copied almost verbatim from the *D&D* manuals, although we quickly made our own additions and adjustments" – the concept of *Rogue* was created. To begin with, just an empty dungeon was in place, as both Wichman and Toy worked on their structure and content before monsters were even considered.

The decision, made fairly early on, to randomly generate the dungeons proved instrumental in the game's long-standing popularity and was a choice that was incredibly innovative at the time. Despite this, the dungeons still had a set structure in place.

"Your character is represented by @ because that shows where you are at"

"Initially we wanted something much more free-form and random," says Glenn. "But the complexities of making sure that every room was reachable finally led us to simplify the map into the nine-room tic-tac-toe board – we could do much better now; we were still pretty new in those days. By randomly making some rooms into a single square of corridor, we managed to add the illusion of more variety."

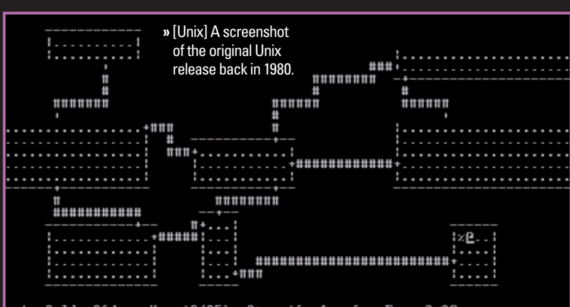
Rogue itself involved you exploring dungeons with your character represented by the @, with the sole aim of gaining possession of the Amulet of Yendor, a task that still eludes many today. "We named our hero Rodney, probably subconsciously influenced by Sir Rodney in the comic strip *The Wizard Of Id*, and Yendor is Rodney spelled backwards," remarks Glenn. Depicted entirely with ASCII characters using an overhead map perspective, *Rogue*'s simplistic but streamlined style is one that holds up well purely because it



ROG-O-MATIC

Such was *Rogue*'s depth and complexity, a program was created that would play the game automatically from the beginning until its true completion. Developed in 1984, Rog-O-Matic was co-authored by Michael Loren Mauldin, who would later develop the Lycos search engine, and has been a subject of scientific study, with a 2005 paper stating: "Rog-O-Matic differs from traditional expert systems in that it has the ability to work within a dynamic environment, for example the randomly generated terrain and adversaries. More importantly, the system was designed to operate in spite of limited information, recording and integrating knowledge about the environment as it is discovered."

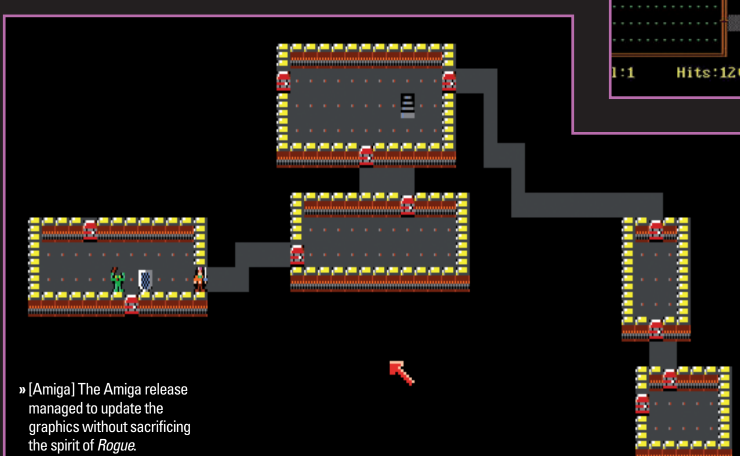
In 2008, Rog-O-Matic XIV was patched and a website owner reported that the program managed to complete *Rogue* six times over as it played 10,000 games in about four hours. Suffice to say, we won't be conquering the Dungeons of Doom ourselves any time soon.



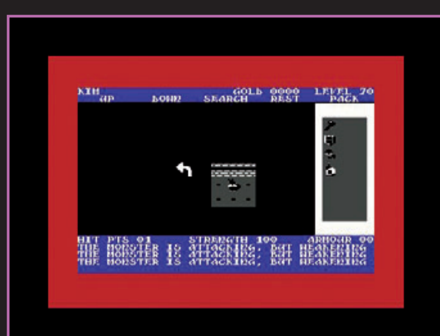
» [Unix] A screenshot of the original Unix release back in 1980.



» [DOS] Adapted by Jon Lane, the PC release gave the visuals a colourful revamp.



» [Amiga] The Amiga release managed to update the graphics without sacrificing the spirit of *Rogue*.





IN THE KNOW

» PUBLISHER: N/A

» DEVELOPER: GLENN WICHMAN, MICHAEL TOY, KEN ARNOLD, JON LANE

» PLATFORM: UNIX

» RELEASED: 1980

» GENRE: RPG

» EXPECT TO PAY: £0-30

is all about the imagination at work. Technical limitations of the era meant that although Toy, Arnold and Wichman were forced to take a primitive approach to visuals, there were still some important choices to be made. "Your character is represented by @ because that shows where you are at. The capital letters for monsters was an aesthetic choice. Lower-case letters didn't stand out well enough. Mixing cases would have allowed us to double the number of monsters, which many roguelikes did, but I never liked the look of it."

Many players reported that the monsters were incredibly intelligent, hunting them down with every opportunity, stalking them mercilessly into the depths of the dungeons. The reality, however, was simply a case of the imagination filling in the blanks.

"This is more a tribute to psychology than game design," says Glenn. "The human mind is constantly looking for cause and effect, and it will find it even where it does not exist. The 'artificial intelligence' of the monsters was extremely primitive. Decisions to attack or retreat were based on their own health and some very basic ideas of following you, plus some random stuff thrown in to make them unpredictable."

The emotion that could be evoked by being chased by yet another monster is an aspect to the game that was never envisaged during its creation, he recalls, even today hearing tales from gamers who have become emotionally involved while playing *Rogue*: "That was actually a big surprise. I can remember a jolt of adrenaline rushing through me upon seeing a T on the screen, while some part of my brain tried to reassure me that it's only a T. I remember watching with amusement when players would hit the keys harder, hoping to do more damage. Of course, I do it myself as well."

> **"I remember watching when players would hit the keys harder, hoping to do more damage"**

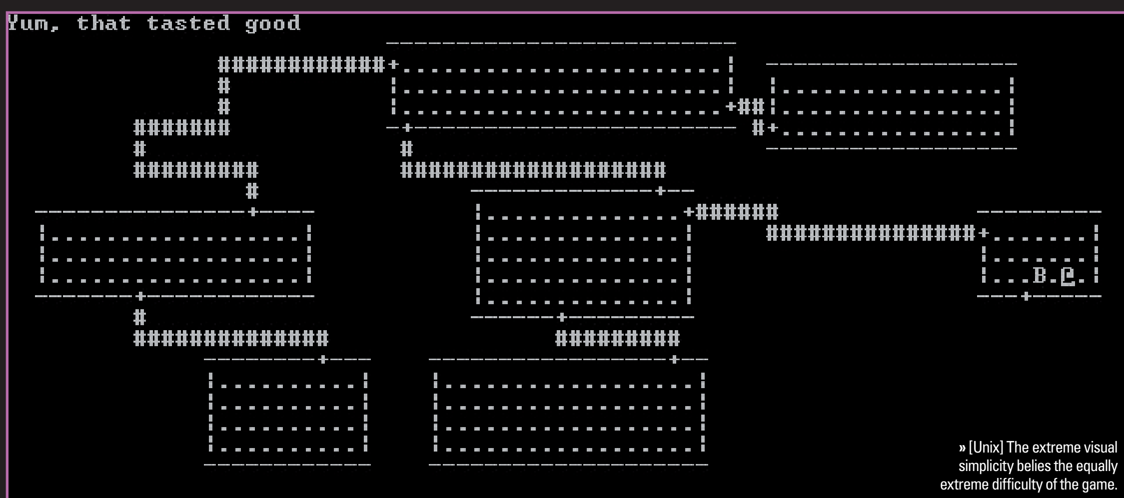
Rogue, it seems, had the making of a hit. "By the time we were creating *Rogue*, the computer lab at Crown College had grown to having about a dozen terminals in a much larger room. I can remember times when *Rogue* was running on every terminal, with all of our friends trying out the latest feature we'd added," remembers Glenn. Eventually, Michael Toy transferred to UC Berkeley, where he completed the first version of *Rogue* with Ken Arnold. "I remember feeling left behind when Michael transferred from UC Santa Cruz to Berkeley, and he and Ken Arnold continued to develop the game without me."

With *Rogue* proving so popular that it was being given away with the BSD operating system and then made available at most college campuses, the creators saw their opportunity to port it across to other computer systems. "Jon Lane initially ported the program to the PC. From there, Michael ported it to the Mac," begins Glenn as he recounts the porting process. "I created the graphics for the Mac version. The PC version continued to use character graphics, though we added colour and we used non-ASCII characters for many objects – the @ became a smiley face, for example. The ST and Amiga versions came later, after Epyx got involved. The graphics for those versions were created by an Epyx employee. Michael did the Amiga port and I did the ST port


» Michael Toy



» [Unix] Expect to see this screen a lot. *Rogue* is hard but ultimately compelling.



» [Unix] The extreme visual simplicity belies the equally extreme difficulty of the game.

ATTACK OF THE CLONES

Such was the influence of *Rogue*, the game spawned a new genre commonly known as 'roguelikes', referencing any games that take on characteristics such as random dungeons, keyboard-based interaction and ASCII characters. We've highlighted a handful of the more common and ultimately enjoyable roguelikes available, all of which are free downloads.

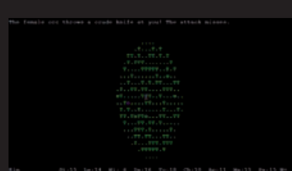
Nethack

Nethack has the option to use the text interface or a more graphical one for those unaccustomed to ASCII symbols. Oh, and your character is accompanied by a pet matching your particular character class: kitten, dog or pony.



Ancient Domains Of Mystery

Released in 1994, *ADOM* features a deeper storyline and more character classes, as well as multiple side quests, focusing more on adventure elements within the *Rogue* environment.



ZangbandTK

Although more colourful, the gameplay style is traditional and still requires exploration. There are numerous races, classes and realms to choose from, with the objective being to reach level 99 and defeat the Serpent of Chaos.



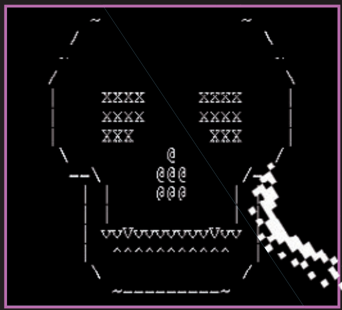
DoomRL

Yes, it really is *Doom*, the first-person shooter, crossed with *Rogue* to create a unique game. It's structurally the same as *Rogue*, but with the ability to collect *Doom* weaponry and earn badges and rankings.



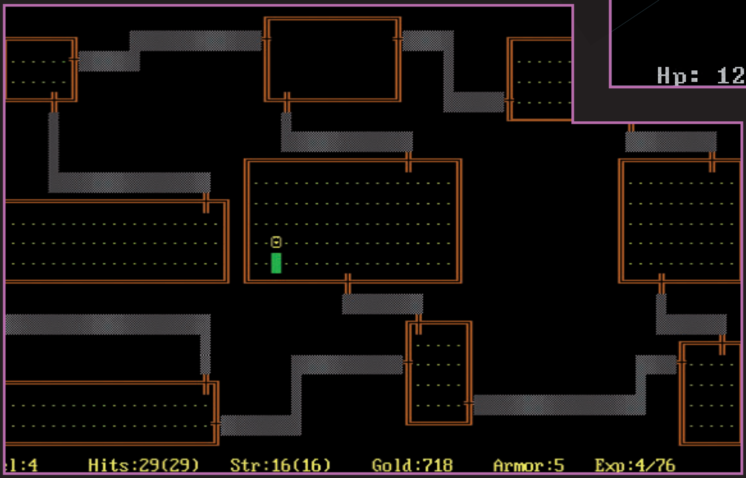


» Glenn Wichman





» [Unix] The # symbols signify the dark corridors and provide some of the game's more tense moments.





» Ken Arnold

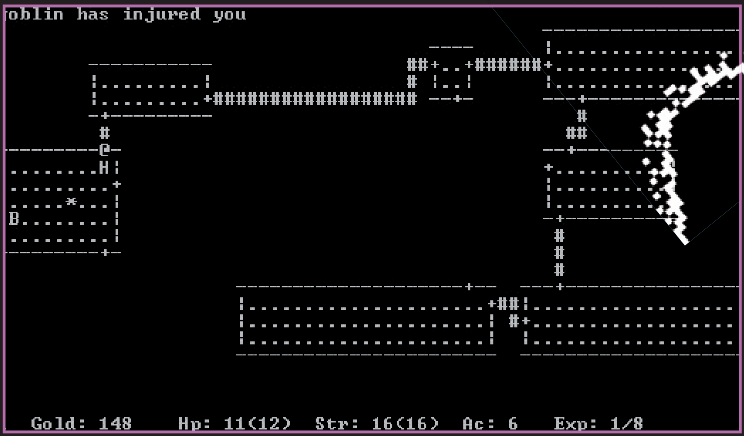
at the same time; we each tried to take advantage of our machine's capabilities and deal with the limitations. When the first PC version came out, the credits read that *Rogue* was created by Michael Toy, Ken Arnold and Jon Lane, with contributions by Glenn Wichman, and that kind of hurt, because it was my game as much as anybody's. Once I got back involved by doing the Atari ST version, people started to appreciate just how much of me is in the game. As time went by, it ended up being Jon and Ken who got less credit than they deserved."

Like many classics, an element of luck played a part in *Rogue*'s success alongside its impeccable game design. "It is well-balanced, cleverly designed, and it really was revolutionary compared to its predecessors in that it was unscripted. It is winnable but extremely hard to win, but fun to play even if you do not win, and fun to play again even once you have won it. Other things that worked in our favour were more a matter of luck. *Rogue* was distributed with BSD, which meant that it became available to play on hundreds of college campuses, right at a time when interest in using computers was becoming really widespread. There were other games included with BSD, but nothing with remotely the richness and complexity of *Rogue*. I think that if there had been a nationwide contest to choose a game to include with BSD, *Rogue* would certainly have been a contender. But, of course, it really just happened because Michael and Ken were at Berkeley and could throw in what they wanted."

Yet despite *Rogue*'s popularity past and present, few could ever claim to have truly conquered its inner dungeons or completed the game. "I have never legitimately won the game," Glenn admits. "Michael has won it several times, I believe. My wife has won the game, and I know a few others who have."

Rogue proved to be an excellent stepping-stone within the industry for the four behind its release. Ken Arnold went on to work for Javasoft, Michael Toy joined Netscape, and Jon Lane started his own company The Code Dogs, while Glenn Wichman allowed his work on *Rogue* to take him into a job at financial software giant Intuit. These days, he prefers the more traditional style of games to their modern counterparts. "I was never a hardcore gamer, but I've always been a game player. I haven't played *Diablo* or *World Of Warcraft* or *Halo* or any of those games, but I have lots of friends who play them so I at least have an idea of what they are about. These days I play things like *Scrabble*. I've often felt that playing modern games is more like watching a movie, and playing *Rogue* is more like reading a book. You still have the same level of engagement, you still have the same emotional response, but your own imagination is doing a lot more of the work."

For those who feel up to the challenge of *Rogue*, Glenn imparts some useful wisdom: "Remember that nothing is happening in real-time. Look at all of your stats and review your inventory before making any move. Winning the game is almost impossible, but the ones who do win are the ones who have the patience to stop themselves from hitting a monster twice in a row without reassessing the situation."



Thanks to Glenn Wichman for the interview and Michael Toy for his contributions to the article

apple II

Specifications

Year released: 1977

Original price: $1,298 for 4K version (board only for $598); $2,638 for 48K version

Buy it now for: £50+ for an Apple II+

Processor: MOS 6502 (1 MHz)

RAM: 4KB (expandable to 48KB)

ROM: 12KB

Display: 280x192 (4 colours/6 colours in rev 1 motherboard); 40x40–48 (16 colours)

Sound: One-channel

Associated magazines: *inCider*, *A+*, *Nibble*, *Softdisk*, *Juiced.GS* (still in print)

Why the Apple II was great: The Apple II boasted a number of firsts, including its prebuilt nature, colour graphics, sound, paddles and game commands in BASIC. Although the line itself eventually stumbled and fell, the original Apple II lived on in terms of inspiring products from myriad competitors. The Apple II also enabled an entire generation of primarily US-based gamers and programmers to start making their own games, and their creations have gone on to be hugely influential and important.

Although eventually eclipsed by Commodore and Atari machines, the Apple II began its life by revolutionising home gaming in the USA. Craig Grannell finds out about the platform's origins and talks to former Apple II developers about what made the machine so great for gaming.

It's fair to say that if we ignore Apple's relatively recent onslaught on the games industry via iPhone OS devices and the App Store, few would consider the Cupertino-based company one that makes products for videogamers, let alone an industry leader in the field.

Even modern Apple Mac owners lack choice when it comes to games, often having to put up with late, expensive, imperfect ports of old Windows titles, or the odd indie creation that trickles through – a situation that hasn't changed a great deal in over two decades. But things weren't always this way: for a brief, glorious time, Apple had one of the best home gaming systems around, courtesy of the Apple II. It wasn't a hugely powerful piece of hardware, although it was impressive for the time, but the Apple II caught the imagination of programmers and fans of videogames – then a very new concept – some of which subsequently became major players in the industry.

Apple's beginnings were in the hobbyist market. This mentality would be retained for the first revision of the Apple II, before a larger Apple's overtly corporate-minded direction resulted in the ill-fated decision to ignore the people who first supported the company and focus entirely on business. But at the start, it was a tale of two Steves: Jobs and Wozniak. Even in his early 20s, Jobs was a shrewd businessman, tactician and visionary, and Wozniak was an engineering genius. An oft-told story of the pair involves *Breakout*: Atari founder Nolan Bushnell offered $100 for every chip that could be reduced from the circuit board. Jobs agreed to split the bonus with Wozniak, who dropped *Breakout*'s chip count by 50, but nonetheless ended up with just a few hundred bucks, Jobs allegedly pocketing the rest. (Wozniak has since stated that he "gladly would have designed the *Breakout* game for Atari for free, just to do it", and admits that he was hurt when he found out about the "dishonesty", although he's over that now.)

In 1976, mostly in Jobs' garage, history was made: the Apple I was created and offered to HP. It declined, and Apple Computer was born. The Apple I was the first single-board computer, sold fully assembled – users had to supply a keyboard, case, monitor and power supply – and innovated by relying on things that we now take for granted: keyboard input and the use of a television for output, rather than the tried-and-tested toggle switches and LEDs that its contemporaries used. For the day, this was impressive stuff, but Wozniak wasn't satisfied.



» The Apple II and III in harmony in an ad. Off-camera, they were punching each other's expansion slots in.

In Jack Connick's 1986 feature for *Call-A.P.P.L.E.* magazine '…And Then There Was Apple', Wozniak revealed that he wanted a faster, more colourful and noisier machine – and the Atari videogame he'd worked on was the driving force behind many of the technical decisions made. "A lot of features of the Apple II went in because I had designed *Breakout* for Atari. I had designed it in hardware. I wanted to write it in software now," he said. Colour was added first, so games could be programmed: "I sat down one night and tried to put [*Breakout*] into BASIC. Fortunately I had written the BASIC myself, so I just burned some new ROMs with line-drawing commands, colour-changing commands, and various BASIC commands that would plot in colour." Having got a ball to bounce around, Wozniak realised that sound was required and so a speaker was added to the Apple II – something that, he said, wasn't planned, but was "just accidental". Paddles were the next addition, implemented via a simple paddle circuit. "So a lot of these features that really made the Apple II stand out in its day came from a game, and the fun features that were built in were only to do one pet project, which was to program a BASIC version of *Breakout* and show it off," explained Wozniak.



Continuing to effectively design for himself, Wozniak fashioned a computer with a number of firsts – the first machine of its kind to be sold completely assembled; the first boasting a plastic case; the first with colour graphics, hi-res, sound and paddles; the first with BASIC game commands and the BASIC in ROM – and only the Apple I had beaten

"The Apple II was architecturally very simple and open. A game program could essentially take over the entire machine"
Bill Budge



"The Apple II didn't have the best graphics and sound capabilities, but it was a machine you could push, and that was satisfying"

Jordan Mechner

it to the punch regarding using a home TV as a monitor. Although the machine's specs – four colours (six after the first revision, adding orange and blue to black, white, green and violet), one-channel sound via a click-emitting toggle circuit, 4KB of RAM by default – would soon be eclipsed and seem restrictive compared to rival machines released in the early Eighties, they were instrumental in sparking the imagination of people who would go on to work wonders with the platform. "There were several microcomputers available in 1979, and my friend, Andy Hertzfeld, had just bought an Apple II and was doing interesting programming on it," recalls Bill Budge, creator of landmark Apple II pinball simulators *Raster Blaster* and *Pinball Construction Set*. "The fact that it had colour swayed me from buying a TRS-80 or one of the other small business machines that were coming to market."

Budge wasn't the only person seduced by the Apple II's graphics capabilities. "My parents bought me an Apple II when I was 15, since we used them at school, and I wanted to produce animations," recalls Jordan Mechner. "I knew from making those animations that the computer was powerful, and that it was capable as a games machine, and so I created *Karateka*. I'd been learning about silent film techniques in my history of cinema classes, and so I needed to produce something that was visually amazing. The Apple II was equipped to do that." Although Mechner reckons that many felt that the Apple II was a dying platform by the time he started producing *Prince Of Persia*, it nonetheless still worked for him at the time: "The Apple II was a platform I understood. It was a lovely machine."

On experiencing Apple II games today, it's interesting to note that many play better – despite looking worse – than ports made to other platforms. It seems this, along with the Apple II's general suitability regarding gaming, was down to the level of control it afforded. "The Apple II was architecturally very simple and open. A game program could essentially take over the entire machine, and clever people could make the machine do amazing things that probably weren't foreseen by Wozniak and Apple," thinks Budge, who fondly remembers the machine's processor: "The Apple II's 6502 wasn't very fast, but it was simple. To get the highest speed, self-modifying code was necessary. There were no penalties for this technique like there are now, and this added a very interesting dimension to game design, which has been largely lost with modern hardware."

Choplifter creator Dan Gorlin has similar memories: "One thing I really enjoyed about the Apple II was that you had absolute control over timing. Everything was real-time – no hardware interrupts, no other programs running – so you could polish the timing of things perfectly."

John Romero, whose first published videogame was on the Apple II, in the form of a *Scout Search* listing in *inCider* magazine, suggests that this openness, combined with any perceived limitations, was hugely beneficial to Apple II gaming,



» And you thought modern Apple print adverts were minimal. Here's how the Apple II was introduced.

» The 16-bit Apple IIGS boasted an interface akin to a colour Mac, but the system retained backwards compatibility with the original Apple II.

Community



A2Central

a2central.com

Describing itself as "your total source for Apple II computing", A2Central is the best place to go for current news on Apple's platform. Along with various links to user groups and a developer directory, the site also backs the last surviving Apple II publication, *Juiced.GS*.



Juiced.GS

juiced.gs

As already noted, *Juiced.GS* is the last surviving Apple II publication, and, having recently celebrated its 15th anniversary, overtook *Softdisk* (1981-95) as the longest-running Apple II periodical. It now has a quarterly schedule and back issues are available in annual 'volumes'.



Apple II History

apple2history.org

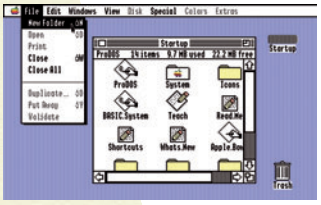
Based around a series of articles printed in the early Nineties in a Nebraska newsletter, this site provides an in-depth history and analysis of the Apple II platform, including hardware, software, related publications and more. For offline reading, visit the downloads section for a text copy.



Virtual Apple II

www.virtualapple.org

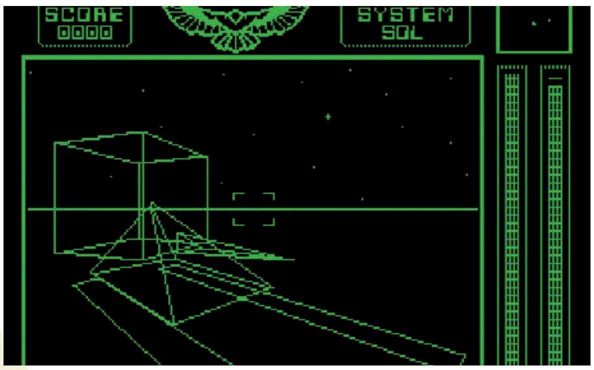
The Virtual Apple II website enables you to play thousands of Apple II games using your browser. To start playing, simply install the plug-in, which works on Windows and Mac OS X and is compatible with Firefox, Safari and Internet Explorer, select a disk, and load a game.



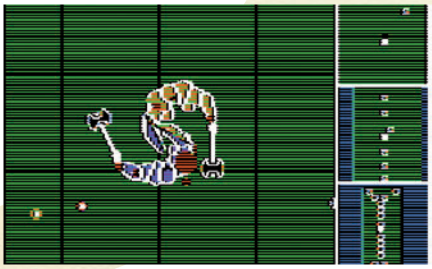






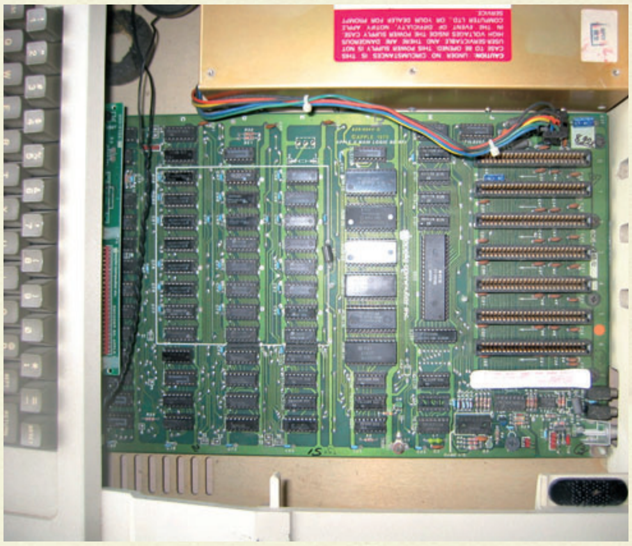


» [Apple II] The superb *Stellar 7* recreated the *Battlezone* coin-op inside the humble Apple II, and then added many more enemies and missions.

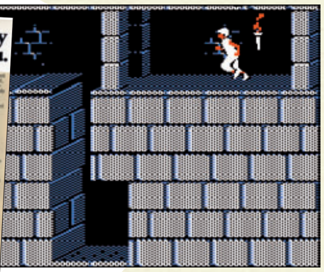




» [iPhone] With the likes of *Lemonade Stand*, *Mystery House*, *Oregon Trail* and *Transylvania* on the App Store, Apple gaming comes full circle.







» (left) A revision of the original Apple II ad, amended after accusations of sexism. See **kelleyad.com/histry.htm** for more on the incident.

Instant Expert

When the first advert for the Apple II ran, Steve Jobs got a complaint from a woman in Oregon, who considered it sexist. It was revised to show a woman using a sophisticated display and the male account manager using a low-res version.

Apple's famous 'rainbow' logo, designed by Rob Janoff, was in part designed to showcase the Apple II's colour graphics capabilities. It replaced a fussy illustration designed by Steve Jobs and Apple co-founder Ronald Wayne, and its silhouette still forms the basis of current Apple logos.

According to Steve Wozniak, he was the sole designer of the 'computer' part of the Apple II. Allen Baum contributed some debugging software, Steve Jobs dealt with the machine's appearance, and Rod Holt designed the power supply.

Apple II creator Steve Wozniak was involved in a plane crash in early 1981, which resulted in short-term memory loss. Wozniak spent some of his free time playing videogames on the Apple II, which aided his recovery.

The Apple II's original Integer BASIC was superseded by Applesoft BASIC, which offered floating-point calculations. The name was derived from 'Apple' and BASIC supplier 'Microsoft'.

The Apple III, released in 1980, was intended to succeed the Apple II, and resolutely focused on business users. To stop overlap between the systems, hardware was added to prevent Apple II emulation mode using Apple III advanced features, and Apple II emulation was also inaccurate. The machine was a flop, and the Apple II line outlived it. **apple3.org** has more on the platform.

providing a uniqueness lost on more advanced platforms. "The C64 and Atari 800 soon became superior for action games because of built-in hardware for graphics and sound, but the problem I saw on those systems was that games tended to look similar because they were all rendering through the same API, the same graphics chip," he says. "The Apple II had no hardware for those things and so programmers had to invent their own ways of getting graphics on the screen, and these different approaches led to a vast array of rendering techniques that could provide you with unique identification of a programmer. I could look at a game and be able to tell you who wrote it because of his technique. That's one striking way that the Apple II allowed you to express your creativity: with a very open canvas."

In hindsight, the only real criticism of the system that developers have regards sound. Budge calls the audio on the Apple II "extremely primitive", adding: "It was really hard to make sounds because there were no timers or interrupts. The only way to make sound was to toggle the speaker bit in various places in your program's main loop." However, he says that in some areas the hardware bettered its rivals for years to come: "For example, the Apple II had the fastest and most reliable floppy disk of any early home machine, which was great for distributing games. On Atari and Commodore, disk manufacture was a nightmare, and the drives were extremely slow."

Over the years, Apple's hardware continued to evolve. The Apple II+ (sold in Europe as the Apple II Europlus) boasted improved start-up and BASIC, included 48KB of RAM as standard, and had enhanced graphics capabilities. However, between 1979 and 1983, no new hardware appeared. During that time, internal politics and squabbling caused Apple to drop the ball with the botched, business-focused Apple III, and it took a surprisingly hostile attitude towards the consumer market and hobbyists that had made the Apple II a success. Only when Apple finally twigged that the Apple II was stubbornly refusing to die did the IIe project kick into gear, eventually producing an impressive low-cost machine – due to using a quarter of the integrated circuits of the II+ – with 80-column display capabilities, modifier and cursor keys, an improved case, and another RAM bump. The compact IIc (integrated floppy drive, 128KB RAM) followed in 1984, before the line was radically revised with the Apple IIGS, essentially a powerful and highly capable next-generation 16-bit response to the Amiga and Atari ST, retaining backwards compatibility with older Apple II software via the Mega II: an entire Apple IIe's functionality on a chip.

But this was the beginning of the end for the Apple II line. No one at Apple was willing to champion the platform, instead concentrating on products that the company itself had led, such as the Macintosh. Left to sell itself, the IIGS initially outperformed the Mac, but then stumbled and limped on until the early Nineties, when it was quietly put down by Apple to stop perceived competition with its own Macintosh LC.

Anyone with a love for videogames – players and creators alike – had long since seen the writing on the wall, and had mostly deserted the ailing platform. Although the likes of *Zany Golf* and *The Immortal* originated on the Apple IIGS, the platform that had practically been responsible for founding home computer gaming in the USA was resigned to receiving an ever-dwindling number of ports from rival systems. "Things were moving fast during that time," remembers Gorlin. "The Apple II was king of the market for years, but what initially made it good for games was its primitive nature. Naturally, then, it was soon replaced by better options for developers, and they moved on accordingly, as did the gamers."



» The June 1984 issue of *inCider* magazine, which included John Romero's first published game, *Scout Search*.

Fast-forward to 1996 and Steve Jobs made a triumphant return to Apple, reversing the company's fortunes – at the time, it was suffering from record losses and a confused product line. Much of this success was down to re-embracing the consumer space that Apple had shunned for so long. While we'll never know if the Apple II could have survived to the present day in some form or remained a major player in gaming had the company that created it actually offered some support, its spirit lives on in the innovation of modern Apple consumer products, and the energy and novelty of myriad iPhone games, a number of which are conversions of or tributes to much-loved Apple II classics. And for the likes of Mechner, Gorlin, Romero and Budge, and many gamers of the day, the Apple II will forever represent a magical time in home gaming that will never be forgotten.

Special thanks to Tom Charlesworth for kindly loaning the Apple II

apple II Perfect Ten Games



01

THE BARD'S TALE

» **RELEASE:** 1985

» **PUBLISHER:** MICHAEL CRANFORD

» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** DONKEY KONG (APPLE II)

01 **As with the** excellent *Ultima* series, *The Bard's Tale* takes inspiration from TSR's *Dungeons & Dragons*. Here, though, the influences are far more pronounced, with the player able to take control of a group of up to six adventurers whenever he wants to go dungeon-delving.

Famed for its impressive 3D visuals and excellent animated portraits – although combat itself is text-based – *The Bard's Tale* is a magnificent adventure that offered a huge amount of choice to the player and improved immeasurably on previous dungeon crawlers. Originally released on the Apple II and published by EA, it went on to be ported to numerous home computers and spawned three sequels and a construction set.

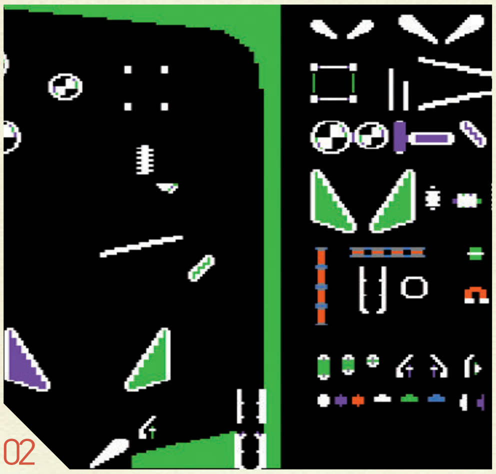
PINBALL CONSTRUCTION SET

» **RELEASE:** 1983

» **PUBLISHER:** BILL BUDGE

» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** RASTER BLASTER

02 **Bill Budge's 1983** effort holds the record for being the first construction game to appear on any home system. Following on from his popular pinball effort *Raster Blaster*, *Pinball Construction Set* featured an amazingly easy control system that made creating tables an absolute breeze. Objects could simply be dragged and dropped around the screen, while the already-impressive physics could be tweaked. Another fantastic touch was the ability to save your created tables to a floppy disk and trade them with friends. It also happened to play a great game of pinball. The game was honoured at the 59th annual Technology & Engineering Emmy Awards in 2008.



02

THE OREGON TRAIL

» **RELEASE:** 1978

» **PUBLISHER:** MECC

» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** AMERICAN GENERATION X

03 **Unlike the other** titles featured in this top ten, *The Oregon Trail* is an educational game. Don't let that put you off, though, for like the Beeb's *Granny's Garden*, it's a highly entertaining piece of work. Following the famous trail, your travellers can die, and you must hunt for food by typing in words as fast as you can. Due to its popularity across American schools, it was re-released in 1985 with greatly improved visuals and expanded hunting, with the ability to use a rifle to gun down targets.

The Oregon Trail was originally built on a mainframe computer before it appeared on the Apple II.

KARATEKA

» **RELEASE:** 1984

» **PUBLISHER:** JORDAN MECHNER

» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** PRINCE OF PERSIA

04 **Before *Prince Of Persia*** became a huge success there was *Karateka*, a surprisingly refreshing fighter that made its debut on the Apple II. Designed by Jordan Mechner while he was still attending university, *Karateka* features many of the blueprints that would eventually mould *Prince Of Persia*. Animation is wonderfully fluid; combat, while simplistic, works extremely well; and there's an epic feel that's missing from many similar fighters. *Karateka*'s most impressive trick, though, is how it was able to tell a convincing story through animation and gameplay. An utterly captivating experience.

CHOPLIFTER

» **RELEASE:** 1982

» **PUBLISHER:** DAN GORLIN

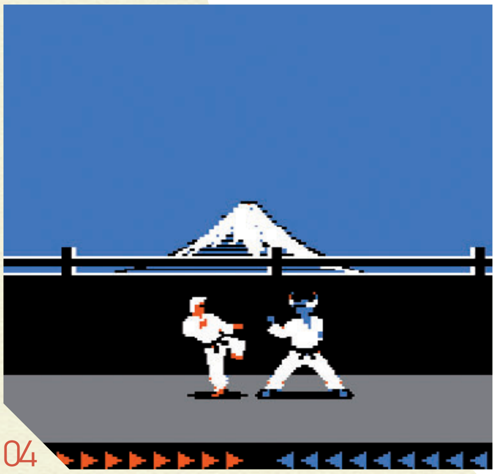
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** AIRHEART

05 **If you want** to know just what Apple's machine was capable of, *Choplifter* is a perfect example. Amazingly slick with polished visuals, it's a startlingly good blaster that is beautifully balanced.

While it initially appears to be a straightforward shoot-'em-up at its core, the lack of an actual scoreboard means that you'll spend just as much time working out how to save hostages as you will trying to blast the enemies that are intent on stopping you. Immediately accessible yet extremely hard to master, *Choplifter*'s quick gameplay and instant appeal saw it translated into a Sega coin-op in 1985.



03



04

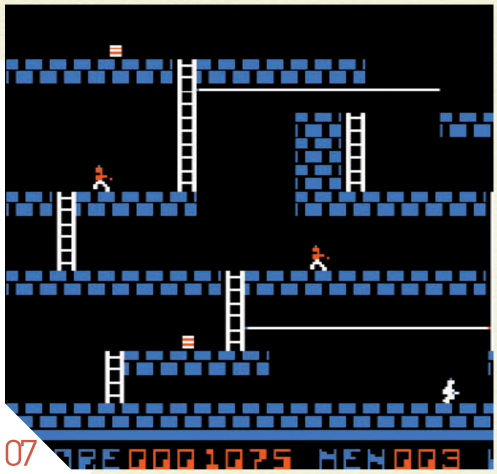


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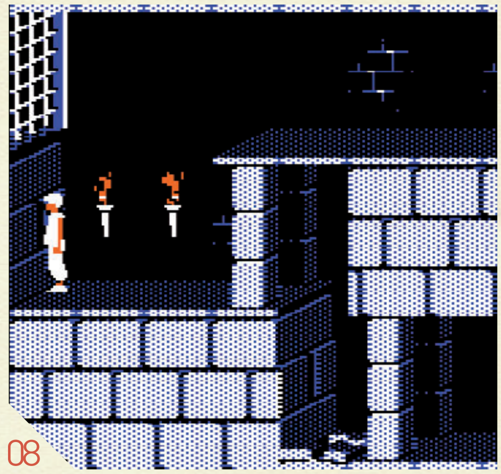
Apple's 8-bit computer offered an astonishing variety of choice when it came to games and was also the birthplace of many popular franchises



06



07



08

ULTIMA I: THE FIRST AGE OF DARKNESS

» **RELEASE:** 1981

» **PUBLISHER:** RICHARD GARRIOTT

» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** CITY OF HEROES

06 **With its dramatic** box art, *D&D* influences and atmospheric visuals, it's little wonder that *Ultima* became such a success.

Its plot – an evil wizard plots to take over the world – may seem trite, but it's an immersive experience. It obviously drew influences from popular role-playing games and the works of Tolkien, but Garriott's attention to detail gave players an experience unlike anything else.

Interestingly, it was remade for the Apple II in 1986 and not only enhanced the visuals but also sped up the gameplay considerably.

LODE RUNNER

» **RELEASE:** 1983

» **PUBLISHER:** DOUGLAS E SMITH

» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** BODY HARVEST

07 **We've lost count** of the numerous iterations of *Lode Runner*. In fact, the only thing our addled brains can remember is that the Apple II version felt like the arcades had come home when we first laid eyes on it.

Like the best Apple II titles, *Lode Runner* impresses because it feels so polished when placed against many of its peers. While the visuals are on the tiny side, it allowed Smith to create some truly memorable levels that still prove challenging today.

Such was its popularity, it was ported to the arcades a year later and received countless conversions.

PRINCE OF PERSIA

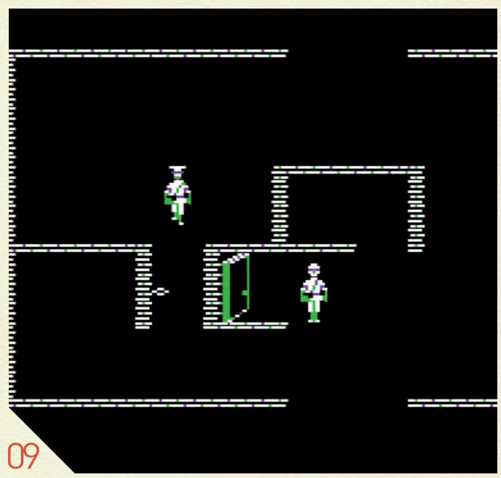
» **RELEASE:** 1989

» **PUBLISHER:** JORDAN MECHNER

» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** THE LAST EXPRESS

08 **Released five years** after *Karateka*, *Prince Of Persia* was a revelation to Apple II owners.

Inspired by *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*, Mechner's masterpiece was a fantastic fusion of hardcore platforming, exploration and exhilarating combat that captured the spirit of adventure flicks. A sensation thanks to its incredibly slick visuals – Mechner used rotoscoping of his brother leaping and running around to pull off the spellbinding animation – *Prince Of Persia* turned into a phenomenal success, and it's little wonder that so many gamers continue to love the Prince's exploits.



09

BEYOND CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

» **RELEASE:** 1984

» **PUBLISHER:** MUSE SOFTWARE

» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** RESCUE SQUAD

09 **Hideo Kojima is** commonly recognised as creating the world's first video stealth game, but the kudos rightly belong to Apple II maestro Silas Warner.

Released three years after *Castle Wolfenstein*, which itself predates *Metal Gear* by six years, Warner's sequel ups the stealthy gameplay by introducing plenty of new mechanics that greatly improve an already-excellent game. A knife can be used to pull off stealthy kills, while there is more focus on impersonating guards and using passes to progress deeper into Hitler's bunker.

Aurally it's also impressive – as you'd expect from the creator of The Voice – further deepening the atmosphere of exploring the large game world.

TAIPAN!

» **RELEASE:** 1982

» **PUBLISHER:** AVALANCHE PRODUCTIONS

» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** N/A

10 **Not to be** confused with either Ocean's interesting 8-bit adventure nor Australia's venomous snake, *Taipan!* is an intriguing turn-based strategy game that offers a surprising amount of depth.

Loosely based on James Clavell's novel *Tai-Pan*, Mega-Micro Computers' effort placed you in the shoes of a trader who must make his fortune via trading and piracy on the high seas. It's a truly enjoyable strategy title that's made all the better because you have so much choice when you're playing. Your ship can be upgraded, loans can be arranged, extortionists must be avoided, and there are seven distinct ports to trade with. A dazzling effort that remains highly enjoyable.

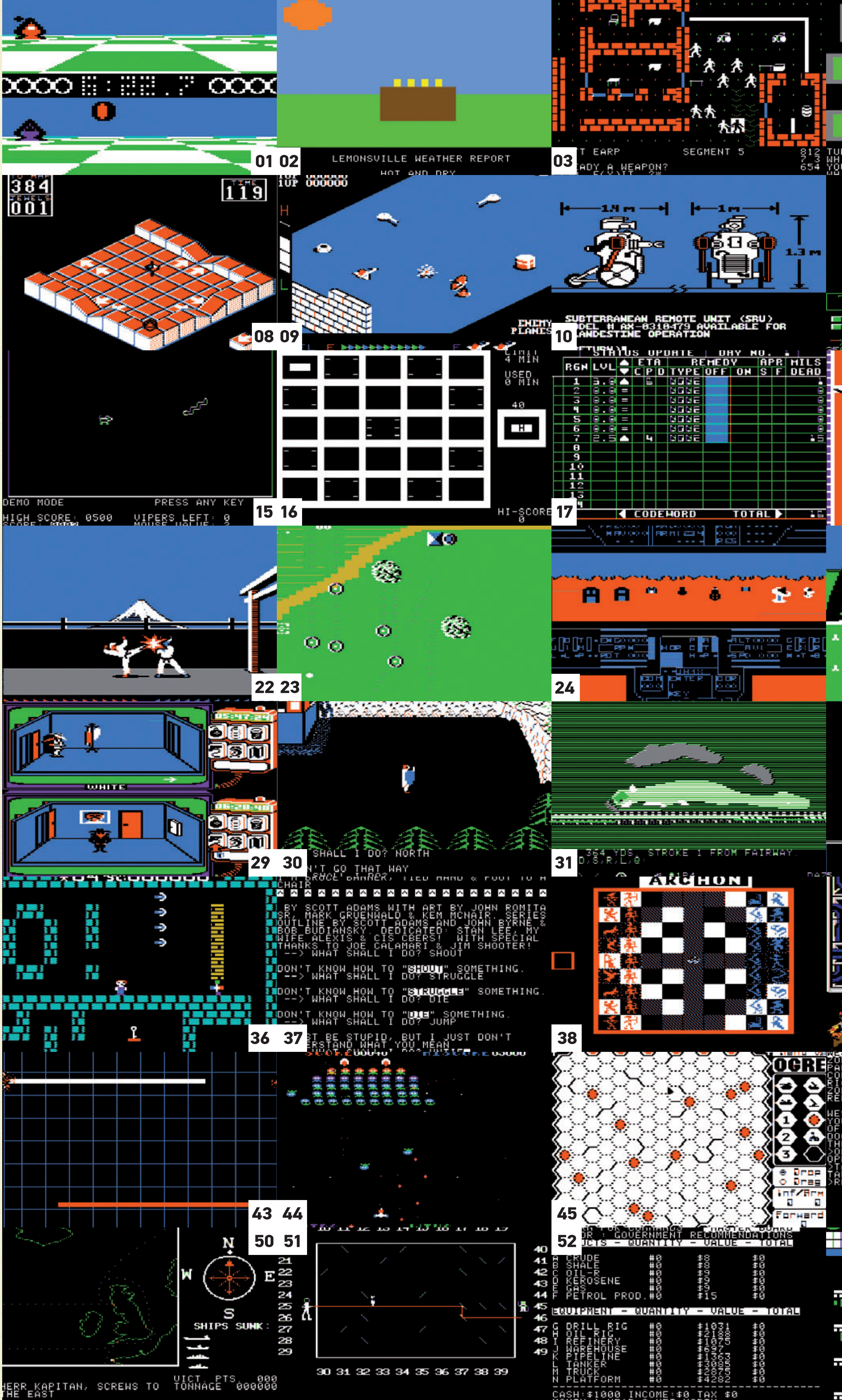


10

Apple II and the rest…

Text adventures, arcade conversions, platformers, flight simulators – the Apple II covered all these genres and more. Here are just a few of the many titles released for it.

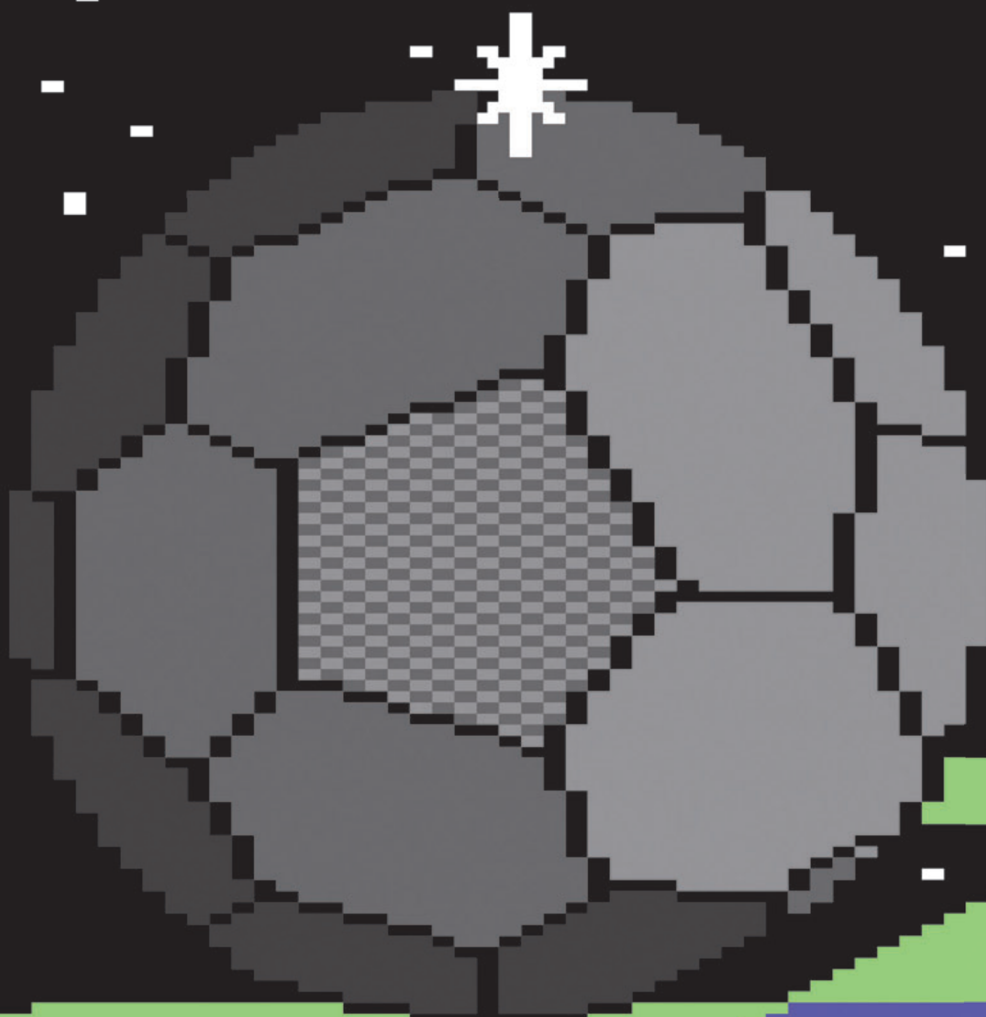
01 BALLBLAZER
02 LEMONADE STAND
03 SIXGUN SHOOTOUT
04 DUNGEON
05 STAR TREK
06 FROGGER
07 HELICOPTER RESCUE
08 SPINDIZZY
09 ZAXXON
10 HACKER
11 SPACE VIKINGS
12 CRUSH, CRUMBLE AND CHOMP!
13 GAUNTLET
14 RAID OVER MOSCOW
15 VIPER
16 PANDEMONIUM
17 EPIDEMIC
18 IMPOSSIBLE MISSION
19 EVOLUTION
20 REPTON
21 TAPPER
22 KARATEKA
23 XEVIOUS
24 SUPER HUEY
25 F15 STRIKE EAGLE
26 ROAD RALLY USA
27 DEATH SWORD
28 CHAMPIONSHIP LODE RUNNER
29 SPY VS SPY
30 CASTLE OF DARKNESS
31 GOLF'S BEST
32 TITAN EMPIRE
33 JET PACK
34 RUN FOR IT
35 BEYOND CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN
36 SARACEN
37 THE HULK
38 ARCHON
39 PIPE DREAM
40 T-REX: THE DINOSAUR SURVIVAL ADVENTURE
41 ONE ON ONE
42 BATTLE OF HOTH
43 TRON
44 ALIEN TYPHOON
45 OGRE
46 ZORK I: THE GREAT UNDERGROUND EMPIRE
47 FIGHT NIGHT
48 THE BARD'S TALE
49 NIBBLER
50 FATHOMS FORTY
51 LAZER MAZE
52 OIL RIG
53 TROLLS AND TRIBULATIONS
54 CHOPLIFTER
55 ABM
56 KORONIS RIFT





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RK: THE GREAT UNDERGROUND EMPIRE
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YRIGHT (C) 1980 BY INFOCOM, INC. ALL
GHTS RESERVED.
RK IS A TRADEMARK OF INFOCOM, INC.
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A WHITE HOUSE, WITH A BOARDED FRONT
OR.
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KE LEAFLET
KEN.
ETRO GAMER RULES!
DAZ JONES
Dip Stick
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The Bard's Tale
By Michael Cranford
(c) 1985
Interplay Productions
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ENEMY 2
8 ABM'S
STAY HERE
SAME RIFT
NEXT RIFT
SKIP ONE

TRAILBLAZER and Cosmic Causeway





IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** GREMLIN GRAPHICS
- » **DEVELOPER:** MR CHIP SOFTWARE
- » **PLATFORM:**
  TRAILBLAZER: C16/C64 (CONVERTED TO AMSTRAD CPC, ATARI 8-BIT, ATARI ST, GIZMONDO, MSX, ZX SPECTRUM)
  COSMIC CAUSEWAY: C64
- » **RELEASED:** 1986 (TRAILBLAZER); 1987 (COSMIC CAUSEWAY)
- » **GENRE:** ARCADE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+

Craig Grannell hurtles headlong down an intergalactic chequerboard highway, hoping to catch up with Trailblazer creator Shaun Southern and his partner in crime for Cosmic Causeway, Andrew Morris

Some videogame designers have a tendency to downplay their retro-gaming achievements. "*Trailblazer* was based on *Metro-Cross*, which was side-on. In effect, all I did was turn it round," explains Shaun 'Sout' Southern as we ask him about the genesis of his much-loved arcade racer. To be fair, we see the similarities: both games have chequered floors and task you with reaching a goal within a tight time limit. On the way, you must avoid foes and obstacles and make use of any assistance provided. But whereas *Metro-Cross* is a fun but quaint side-scrolling arcade game, *Trailblazer* gave you, in 1986, an absurdly fast space-age 3D track on low-powered 8-bit computers. (Although the split-screen C64 version is most well-known, the game began life on the humble C16.)

In the transition from *Metro-Cross* to *Trailblazer*, ideas became significantly more abstract: a running man became a bouncing ball, and obstacles and helpful items both took the form of coloured squares – blue ones bounce you into the air, purple ones bump you backwards, the dreaded cyan ones reverse the controls, green and red squares speed you up and slow you down respectively, and black squares represent holes, which should be avoided at all costs, since falling into one costs you precious seconds. Most importantly, the sense of speed in *Trailblazer* eclipses *Metro-Cross* by some margin. By comparison, Namco's game feels like a sedate – and rather flatter – *Pitfall*.

Andrew Morris, Shaun's design partner over a decade or so, has a different take on *Metro-Cross* and *Trailblazer*, which Shaun completed as Andrew joined Mr Chip Software: "The games are barely comparable. It was just the spark of an idea that turned into something very different."



» [C16] Bouncing around on Track 13. To skip directly to a later track, you can key in a four-letter password on the title screen.

Shaun sticks to his guns, though, even considering *Trailblazer*'s 3D track no big deal: "All the Commodore machines had great graphics capabilities, and the 3D in *Trailblazer* was something you could do with the specific C64 and C16 hardware. The effect looked a lot better than it really was – a lot of people were amazed by what was really only colour cycling."

"Trailblazer gave you an absurdly fast space-age 3D track on low-powered 8-bit computers"

On interviewing Shaun, it soon becomes clear that he created games quickly, and so the exact process of C16 *Trailblazer*'s development and the reasoning behind key decisions is lost. However, he does reveal that "the game took about a month in all", and that: "Once the graphic was drawn for a flat track with two 'lane colours' on it, all I had to do was change the colours on the raster interrupt and I had a scrolling track." The main task in the game – reaching a goal before the timer runs out – was common to many titles of the day, including *Metro-Cross*, but also something that Shaun had previously used for *Kikstart* on the C16.

Next, Shaun created a ball for the main character: "I wanted something that would roll, and the ball's animation added to the speed effect. In hindsight, the ball was a mistake, because the game suffered sales-wise from not having an identifiable character." The final piece of the puzzle was designing 16 tracks. "They were created in 'code', and were quick to build, although I had to test each one to make sure it was fun. A lot of tracks had to be tweaked so you could restart after falling down a hole and still finish the course," he adds. Despite this, many of the game's courses are frustrating, which Shaun puts down to "having more patience back then", admitting that his game often crosses the barrier between addictive and "plain annoying".

With the C16 version in the can, Shaun looked towards the C64. "I decided to convert the game right away," he says. "Most people were amazed I'd done the C16 version first, but I'd created a lot of quick, fun C16 games, so it was natural for me to do things that way." This time borrowing from *Kikstart* on the C64, Shaun decided on a split-screen approach, enabling two players to battle it out over three courses, thereby creating, to quote Julian

» [C16] The ball bounds into the air. Shaun says *Trailblazer*'s jumps were designed to "add another dimension" to the game.













MECHANICAL THINKING

One of the best decisions that Shaun made when developing *Kikstart II* was adding a computer-controlled AI player, for lone gamers who nonetheless enjoyed split-screen gaming. Said AI was a tad simple, with obvious catch-up programmed in, but it was challenging and made for a fun opponent.

By contrast, *Trailblazer*'s CPU-controlled player pretty much immediately zooms ahead, finishes every track in double-quick time, and does the AI equivalent of laughing in your face. Well, at least that's our experience, and Shaun largely agrees.

"Yeah, it does tend to run along the edges all the time, and it could have been a lot better, giving you more of a chance," he says. Perhaps surprisingly, there's nothing pre-programmed: "As far as I remember, the AI doesn't 'know' where speed-ups are – it just heads for them and jump squares, avoids holes and blockers, and knows which way to go in cyan zones." Maybe we're just rubbish, then. Perhaps some enterprising programmer can create a special **Retro Gamer** version, where *Cosmic Causeway*'s guns are added to *Trailblazer*, so we can blow it to pieces and enable wins to be less elusive…

"It ran so fast it overheated the chip inside the Gizmondo, so they had to make hardware changes"

Rignall in *Trailblazer*'s *Zzap!64* review, a "loose cross between *Pitstop II* and *Bounder* [with] the addictive qualities of both". For Shaun, the simultaneous two-player mode was an important feature, as it had previously worked well in the *Kikstart* games and later became a key component of *Super Cars 2* and the *Lotus* series. From a technical standpoint, he doesn't recall it – nor anything else – being a problem for the C64: "Technically, the game's the same as the C16 version: raster interrupts changing colours, some animation on the ball, and so on." Further additions were made to gameplay, though, such as white squares that send you to warp speed in the arcade mode – which tasks you with completing every course in turn, much like the C16 original – that also has a bonus round after every three levels. "Ah, Simon, but using the ball to bounce around a pattern," remembers Shaun. "It was a nice distraction, and you had to have a bonus round. It's rule #463 of games programming!"

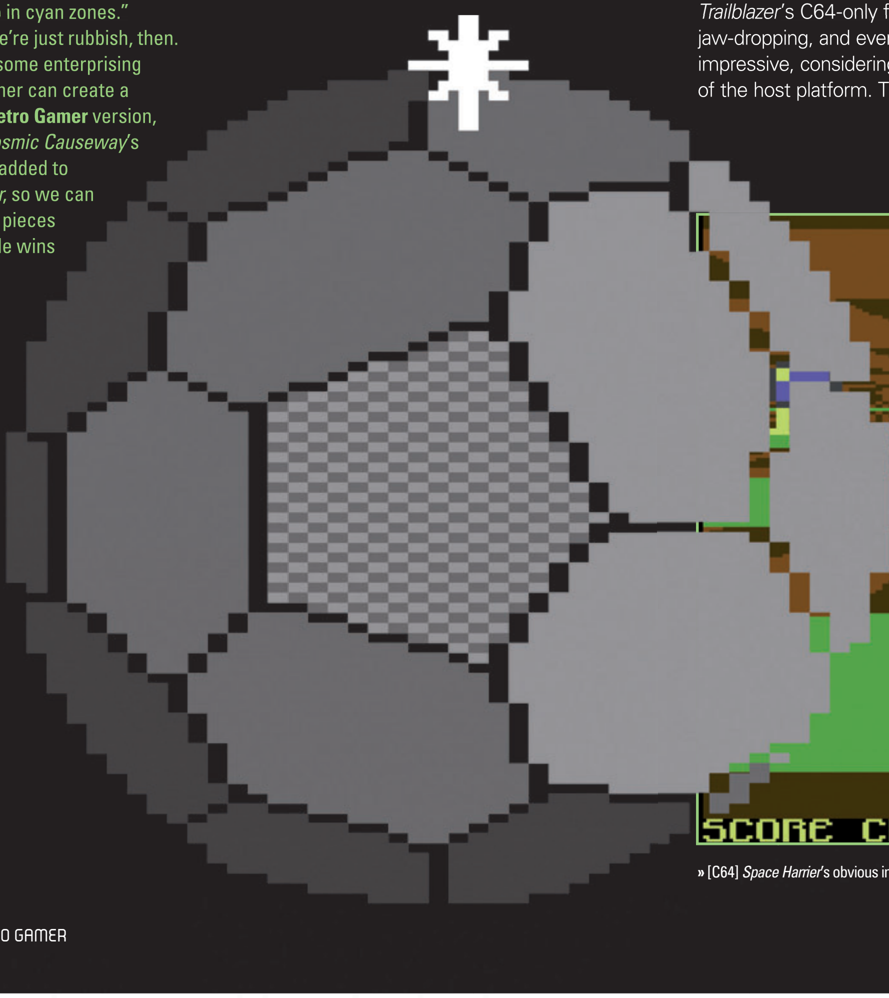
Trailblazer wasn't a big commercial hit, but it was well received by reviewers of the day. The game Sizzled in *Zzap!64*, scoring 93%, and the C16 and C64 versions both scored 9/10 in *Commodore User*. Today, Shaun considers both initial versions of *Trailblazer* decent games, although for him the C64 release wins out, because of the split-screen gameplay. Few regrets are evident, as he notes: "We couldn't really have made any graphical changes, due to how the game worked and the need for it to be at 50 frames per second, and at the time I was happy with how it played, even if it was a little annoying." In hindsight, the only change he'd make would be to the C64 single-player game: "It should be full-screen, like the C16 version. I'm pretty sure I could have done that fairly easily, and I've no idea why I didn't…"

Trailblazer was subsequently converted to other platforms by various programmers, enabling Shaun to firmly set his sights on *Trailblazer*'s sequel: *Cosmic Causeway*. In 1987, *Trailblazer*'s C64-only follow-up was jaw-dropping, and even today it's impressive, considering the limitations of the host platform. The chequerboard track runs across the entire screen, and the gameplay is deeper, due to the addition of obstacles and some frantic 3D shooting sections. "Two words," says Shaun, when we ask about what inspired the game. "*Space Harrier*."

Unlike *Trailblazer*, *Cosmic Causeway* was a co-production between Shaun and Andrew, who only provided the title screen for *Trailblazer* on the C64, and both remember the potential that they saw in Sega's groundbreaking 3D shoot-'em-up. "We noticed *Space Harrier* had a similar 'moving into the screen' concept as *Trailblazer*, but a lot more moving sprites and obstacles," says Andrew. "We'd had ideas along those lines – they were a logical progression from *Trailblazer* – but *Space Harrier* gave us further inspiration."

Shaun remembers being particularly excited about the prospect of replicating aspects of *Space Harrier*'s dazzling visuals: "I saw that 3D ground effect and knew I could do that for *Trailblazer 2* – and it did look pretty spectacular on a C64." This major visual change wasn't too hard to implement either, he claims: "Because of how the ground worked in *Trailblazer*, it was just as easy to make the chequerboard track take up the entire floor. We were only cycling colours, not rendering polygons."

Some aspects of *Cosmic Causeway* were more challenging, though, as Andrew reveals: "The C64 had a far more limited sprite generator than the likes of *Space Harrier*, and so we had to work on ideas that were within the limitations of the hardware." Sega's arcade hardware happily scaled objects and threw them about with merry abandon, but Commodore's beige box wasn't nearly as powerful. "Some of the foes and objects were inspired by *Space Harrier*," he continues, "but





» [C64] *Space Harrier*'s obvious influence on *Cosmic Causeway*: a screen-wide floor, a ceilinged area, and attacking aliens.



» [Spectrum] The Speccy version of *Trailblazer* lacks colours, but it's great if you suddenly have the urge to make your eyes explode.

CONVERSION CAPERS

Although *Trailblazer* was designed for Commodore hardware, that didn't stop Gremlin porting the game to a number of other formats, presumably due to the high regard for the C64 release. In just a few months, the game found itself on the Atari 8-bit, Atari ST, Amstrad CPC, MSX and ZX Spectrum.

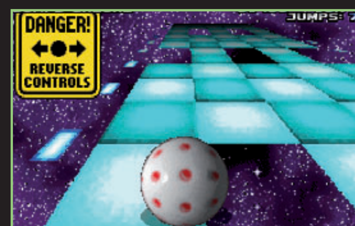
Sadly, the conversions pale in comparison to the Commodore versions. The Atari release comes close, but lacks the smoothness of the Commodore games, and the Atari ST version is surprisingly sluggish and full of insanely unfair tracks. The CPC makes a workmanlike go of things, despite a distracting track that 'wraps' underneath itself, and the Spectrum version is eye-strain central, with players having to rely on indistinct 'shading' variations to differentiate tile types. It reviewed fairly well in 1986, but in the harsh light of the modern day, it's slightly less fun than being repeatedly punched in the face by a giant weasel. "I just provided track data – I didn't code any of the conversions," says Shaun, distancing himself from the 'bad' *Trailblazer* versions, adding: "And since the Spectrum was doing cartwheels trying to achieve what was easy for this type of game on the C64, I'm not envious of those who did!"



» [Atari ST] Aside from the rubbish graphics, sluggish gameplay and poor tracks, we love the ST *Trailblazer*.



» [Amstrad CPC] The strange wraparound track on the Amstrad version is annoyingly distracting.



» [GBA] WiDDY's unofficial GBA *Trailblazer* boasts SNES-like graphics and all the tracks from the C64 version.



» [iPhone] Shaun's hoping that the iPhone remake of *Trailblazer* from Team 3 Games will be available soon.

our scaling was done by hand.". On the C64, scaling had to be simulated by drawing several versions of each graphic, and utilising expanded sprites when objects were very close to you. "It was a slow, laborious job, and we were limited by low resolution, three colours, and the fact that the sprites had to be recognisable at high speed," explains Andrew. He notes how Shaun's programming routines enabled the game to run at high speed and remain playable, but there's no getting away from the chunky nature of the trees and rocks that zoom past, nor that it looks like they're fired towards you in clumps.

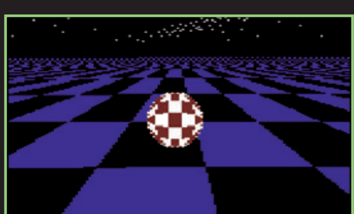
Still, no C64 gamer was complaining. *Cosmic Causeway* exactly matched its predecessor's scores in *Zzap!64* and *Commodore User*, with reviewers bowled over by the game's balanced gameplay, breakneck pace, and additions such as a credits/power-up system and end-of-level dragons that looked suspiciously like miniature versions of similar beasties from a certain Sega coin-op.

"Yeah, the end-of-level baddies were ripped straight from *Space Harrier*," laughs Shaun. But he remains proud of the job that the tiny team did on one of the best home videogame experiences of its day, and explains why it succeeded: "You've as much time to make a sequel as an original game, but a lot of the 'work' is done, and so you can go to town. In *Cosmic Causeway*, power-ups were added to give the player more to do. You have things to play off against each other to work out whether they'll help or not, giving the game more depth. As for the bosses, I refer you back to rule #463!"

Although various *Trailblazer* clones subsequently appeared – notably *Jump 'N' Roll* and an unofficial *Trailblazer* on the Amiga – it was 2005 before Shaun himself unleashed the series on another platform: the ill-fated Gizmondo. "I was working for Warthog, who were taken over by Gizmondo. In my spare time, I tried getting a *Trailblazer* track going, and it grew from there," he explains. With the demo shown to bosses "desperate to get games ready for the launch", a few late nights saw Shaun complete a dazzling version of his game, which boasted *Tron*-like visuals and undulating tracks. "Unfortunately, it ran so fast it overheated the chip inside the Gizmondo, and the game would freeze, so they had to make hardware changes," laughs Shaun.

Gizmondo sank without a trace, but *Trailblazer* grabbed a life raft. The original game recently arrived as an in-app purchase for the iPhone Commodore 64 emulator, which Shaun hopes will whet people's appetites for a new version. There's a tantalising glimpse of such an update on the website of Team 3 Games, which Shaun co-founded four years ago. To our eyes, the revamped *Trailblazer* channels *S.T.U.N. Runner* on top of Gizmondo-like aesthetics.

"The camera's now in full 3D as it moves around the wheel, and we've loads of skins, redesigned tracks and new music," reveals Shaun, adding that the game still includes dreaded cyan zones. So why another version of *Trailblazer*? Indeed, why does Shaun think that it still strikes a chord with gamers? "It's certainly not the graphics, and the original game is quite annoying," he says. "But in the end, when playing it, you know you're in control. If you make a mistake, you know you can do better and so you have another go… and another… and another…"





» [C64] Buy the right power-up and you can roll along the ceiling. Very handy on certain stages.



» [C64] Helpfully, huge areas of the floor turn on and off in later stages of *Cosmic Causeway*.

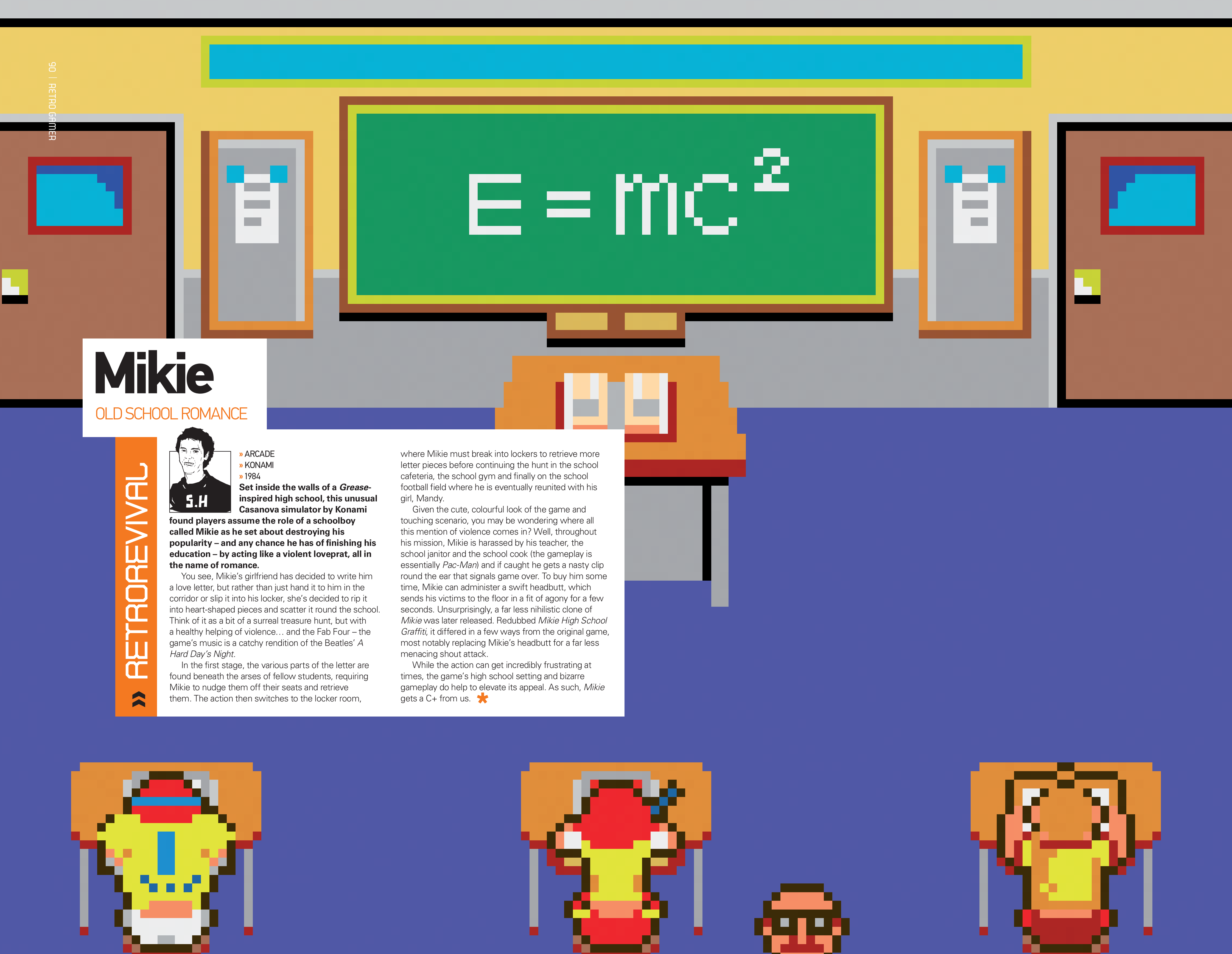


DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

KIKSTART II (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: C64
YEAR: 1987

P.O.D.: PROOF OF DESTRUCTION
SYSTEM: C16/C64
YEAR: 1987

LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO CHALLENGE
SYSTEM: AMIGA/ATARI ST
YEAR: 1990



» RETROREVIVAL

Mikie

OLD SCHOOL ROMANCE

» ARCADE
» KONAMI
» 1984

Set inside the walls of a *Grease*-inspired high school, this unusual Casanova simulator by Konami found players assume the role of a schoolboy called Mikie as he set about destroying his popularity – and any chance he has of finishing his education – by acting like a violent loveprat, all in the name of romance.

You see, Mikie's girlfriend has decided to write him a love letter, but rather than just hand it to him in the corridor or slip it into his locker, she's decided to rip it into heart-shaped pieces and scatter it round the school. Think of it as a bit of a surreal treasure hunt, but with a healthy helping of violence… and the Fab Four – the game's music is a catchy rendition of the Beatles' *A Hard Day's Night*.

In the first stage, the various parts of the letter are found beneath the arses of fellow students, requiring Mikie to nudge them off their seats and retrieve them. The action then switches to the locker room, where Mikie must break into lockers to retrieve more letter pieces before continuing the hunt in the school cafeteria, the school gym and finally on the school football field where he is eventually reunited with his girl, Mandy.

Given the cute, colourful look of the game and touching scenario, you may be wondering where all this mention of violence comes in? Well, throughout his mission, Mikie is harassed by his teacher, the school janitor and the school cook (the gameplay is essentially *Pac-Man*) and if caught he gets a nasty clip round the ear that signals game over. To buy him some time, Mikie can administer a swift headbutt, which sends his victims to the floor in a fit of agony for a few seconds. Unsurprisingly, a far less nihilistic clone of *Mikie* was later released. Redubbed *Mikie High School Graffiti*, it differed in a few ways from the original game, most notably replacing Mikie's headbutt for a far less menacing shout attack.

While the action can get incredibly frustrating at times, the game's high school setting and bizarre gameplay do help to elevate its appeal. As such, *Mikie* gets a C+ from us. *



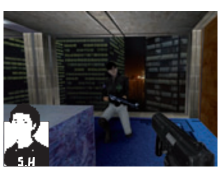


>> Xbox Live really comes of age this month thanks to the long-overdue Perfect Dark and Sega's glorious After Burner Climax. Unfortunately, Sonic The Hedgehog's latest compilation is nowhere near the same standards

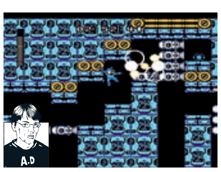
PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
After Burner Climax
An utterly amazing port that reeks of classic Sega and plays like a dream.



STUART
Perfect Dark
Beautiful update that took a long time to appear but was well worth the wait.



ASHLEY
Mega Man 10
Enemies like Sheep Man and Goal Post Man make this one of my favourite *Mega Mans* yet.

>> PERFECT DARK

Perfect Dark

UNLICENSED TO KILL

XBLA

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** 800 POINTS
- » **PUBLISHER:** MICROSOFT
- » **DEVELOPER:** 4J STUDIOS
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-8

BRIEF HISTORY

» First released by Rare in 2000, *Perfect Dark* was the spiritual successor to the incredibly popular *GoldenEye*. A standalone game was also released for the Game Boy Color, while *Perfect Dark Zero* – originally planned for Nintendo's GameCube – eventually became a launch title for the Xbox 360.



» [Xbox 360] Joanna's character model has been dramatically improved over the N64 original.

GO DEEPER

The facts behind Perfect Dark

>> Peter Molyneux replaces David Doak as one of the game's grunts. And yes, you can shoot him

>> In the original game you were going to be able to use the Game Boy's camera to scan your face onto characters. The feature was cut at the last moment

>> The originally N64 version sold 2.5 million units. Highly impressive for a new piece of IP



The original *Perfect Dark* was a game so ambitious that its host hardware just couldn't keep up with it. Effectively *GoldenEye 2* – albeit with a sci-fi theme – even an erratic frame rate couldn't mask *Perfect Dark*'s brilliance. Therefore, it's rather exciting to see it being given a second crack of the proverbial whip on a system that can do it the aesthetic justice it always deserved in the first place.

And *Perfect Dark* really is a fantastic game, even after ten years of evolution for first-person shooters. Yes, many of the rooms are large and barren, it lacks the dramatic set pieces that the genre is now known for, and the AI doesn't feel quite as strong as we remember, but the sheer imagination on display in the level design, weapons and cool gadgets still manages to impress – even more so when you consider the striking hi-tech weaponry that newer first-person shooters now offer.

With a script that's as tight as the level design – even if it does get a little barmy in the last third – *Perfect Dark* offers a thrilling arcade experience that's further boosted by online leaderboards, allowing you to compete against friends for the fastest completion times across all stages and difficulties. Playing online is also great fun, especially as you have access to three returning *GoldenEye* levels that will cause memories to come flooding back. Playing against only seven other players feels a little old in this day and age, but the included maps are so well designed that the game would only suffer if more players were included, and it's already been boosted beyond the original four players, which can't be sniffed at.

One thing that has mystified us is 4J Studios' reluctance to include the original control setup that appeared on the N64 offering, especially as Rare's official sequel *Perfect Dark Zero* featured it. The lack of a southpaw option for lefties will also irk some.

Fortunately, the three available control methods are perfectly acceptable and don't detract from *Perfect Dark*'s superb gameplay. Joanna Dark's back and she's never played, nor indeed looked, better than she does here.

In a nutshell

Yes, it can look a little flat and lifeless next to the current crop of new first-person shooters, but you can't hide *Perfect Dark*'s excellent gameplay. Add in an enjoyable multiplayer mode and this is well worth the 800-Point asking price.

>> Scores

Presentation	80%
Graphics	82%
Sound	93%
Playability	94%
Addictivity	92%

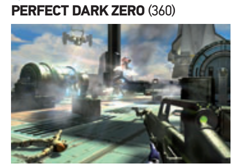
Overall 91%

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
GOLDENEYE 007 (N64)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
PERFECT DARK ZERO (360)

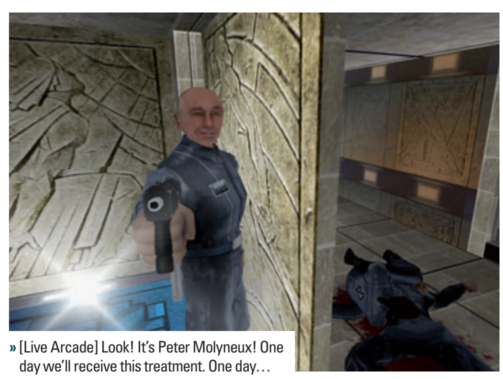


OPINION



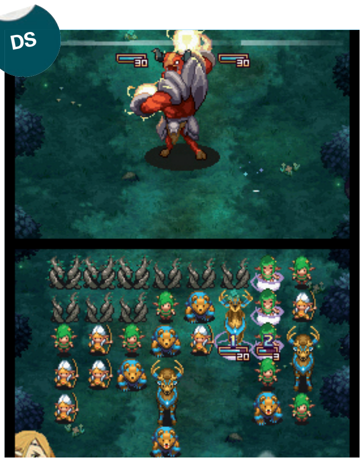
When this was first out, I'd already left the N64 behind for the Dreamcast. So I missed out on it, aside from the odd multiplayer match. Getting to know it properly on Xbox Live Arcade has been a real treat. Turns out it's actually a great game.

Ashley Day



» [Live Arcade] Look! It's Peter Molyneux! One day we'll receive this treatment. One day…

DS





Might & Magic: Clash Of Heroes

NOT YOUR USUAL MIGHT & MAGIC GAME…

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** DS » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £29.99 » **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT » **DEVELOPER:** CAPYBARA GAMES » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

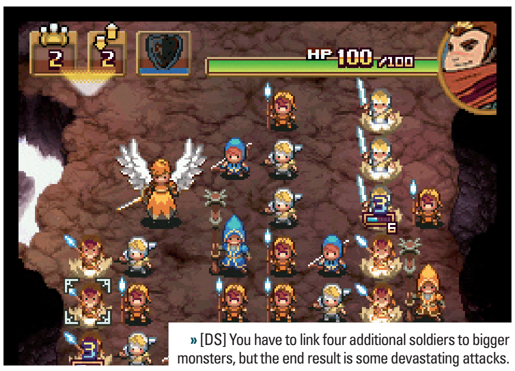
S.H

Aside from its fantasy setting, Ubisoft's new *Might & Magic* game shares very little with the original PC games. Worry not, though, for despite its tenuous links to the *Might & Magic* universe it's still one of the best puzzle/strategy RPGs we've played since *Puzzle Quest* hit the DS, and it's definitely worthy of your attention.

At its heart, *Clash Of Heroes* uses simple 'match three' mechanics. Matching groups horizontally creates walls to hinder your opponents, while vertical groups prepare to attack. Different classes have to charge for a certain number of turns before they can unleash their attacks, but they will slowly build in strength while they do so. Once an attack is unleashed, they'll wipe out any enemies in their way and directly damage your opponent, whose armies are situated on the top screen.

Further strategy is unleashed as you slowly recruit new squads, ranging from magic-using pixies to acid-spewing dragons, and discover new items of magic and gain levels. Battle requests can also change, with some tasks requiring you to protect certain objects or target specific enemies. That's easier said than done, as troops that don't directly hit it are wasted.

Add in some glorious sprite design and an enthralling story and *Clash Of Heroes* morphs into one of the best DS strategy games in ages. Even if it doesn't have much to do with its namesake.



» [DS] You have to link four additional soldiers to bigger monsters, but the end result is some devastating attacks.

OPINION

D.J

It's refreshing to discover that plenty of new puzzle ideas still exit. While it has little to do with the franchise it has been attached to, *Clash Of Heroes* is nonetheless a superb puzzler that manages to out-puzzle *Puzzle Quest*. High praise indeed.

Darran Jones

>> Scores

Presentation	87%
Graphics	88%
Sound	76%
Playability	94%
Addictivity	92%

Overall 92%

Sonic Classic Collection

SONIC'S BACK, BUT HE'S PICKED UP SOME BAD HABITS

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** DS » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £29.99 » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

D.J

Sega's new compilation is obviously not aimed at the likes of you or us. We say this because the emulation on offer here is not going to fool anyone who grew up with the original Mega Drive releases.

Initially all appears well. There's a short logo that explains how all the included versions are US and thus run at a decent speed, while *Sonic & Knuckles* finally has the lock-on capabilities that were missing from the otherwise excellent *Ultimate Mega Drive* compilation. Start playing any of the four included games, however, and you immediately realise that these aren't the *Sonic* games you grew up with.

Granted, it happens subtly – a whiff of slowdown here, a few glitchy lines there – but the longer you play the more obvious it becomes that the included ports are far from perfect. What's really baffling here, however, is that the lead coder is responsible for the DS's homebrew Mega Drive emulator and that all the *Sonic* games actually run better on that than they do in this official £30 release.

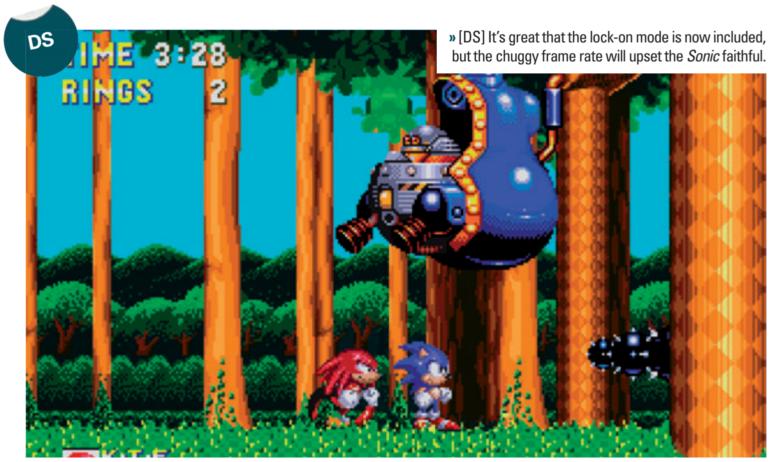
The casual player or younger audience will no doubt lap this new compilation up, because for all its roughness, it still features four excellent games. We expect far more from compilations such as this, though, and as good as the 2D *Sonic* games are, it's frustrating that they've received such lazy, uncaring attention.

>> Scores

Presentation	45%
Graphics	75%
Sound	89%
Playability	75%
Addictivity	68%

Overall 65%

DS



» [DS] It's great that the lock-on mode is now included, but the chuggy frame rate will upset the *Sonic* faithful.



OPINION

A.D

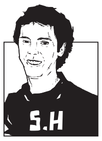
The emulation really isn't up to scratch, which is strange considering how Sonic Team usually requests strict quality control. This is fine for families looking for cheap games, but serious retro gamers will find better *Sonic* packages elsewhere.

Ashley Day

Street Fighter IV

THIS JAW-DROPPING CONVERSION IS DEFINITELY A GROWER

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** IPHONE/IPOD TOUCH » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360
» **RELEASED:** OUT NOW » **PRICE:** £5 » **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1-2



If you are happy to invest the time to relearn the game by hanging out inside its decent Dojo mode, we think you'll likely get quite a bit of enjoyment from this impressive conversion.

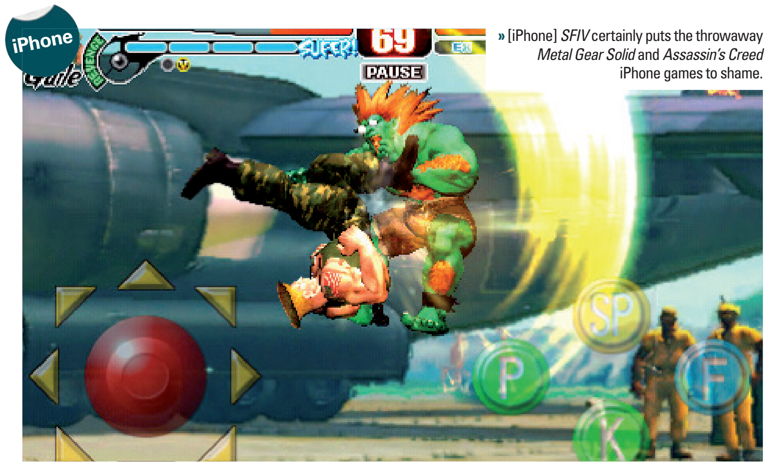
As you would expect, things have had to have been cut back to make the conversion possible. You only get eight fighters (Abel being the only newbie to make the cut), final boss Seth is replaced with M. Bison (for the better), and there are also fewer stages, moves and frames of animation too. But the game still looks superb, and the loading times are nippy too, which is a big plus.

Owing to the touch-motion controls, understandably the combat system has also been pared down – attacks are now spread between a single punch and kick button, which let you perform most of the familiar moves from the game, with another for Focus Attacks and another for use in Assist Mode that enables you to dish out special moves with a simple button (and a direction) tap. Finally, Ultra Combos and Revenge Attacks can be actuated in their usual way or by tapping their respective bars for easy access during the fights.

Admittedly, this conversion isn't without a few inevitable issues – such as the controls obscuring the action at times, and the lack of button and direction nub giving an imprecise feel to the battles (which we noticed did improved the more we played the game) – but it remains a must-own for any *SFIV* fan and is definitely the best fighter currently on iPhone.

>> Scores

Presentation	89%
Graphics	92%
Sound	90%
Playability	76%
Addictivity	75%
Overall	**76%**



» [iPhone] *SFIV* certainly puts the throwaway *Metal Gear Solid* and *Assassin's Creed* iPhone games to shame.



OPINION



Granted, you won't be able to pull off Dragon Punches on command and the roster is piddly, but we still enjoyed this port. Graphically amazing and with a solid difficulty curve, it's far from perfect, but we really can't see how Capcom could have made this any better.

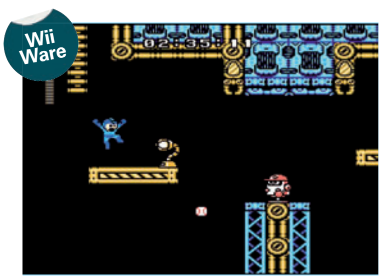


The Eye Of Judgment Legends

» **SYSTEM:** PSP
» **PRICE:** £19.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

>> You won't find a camera or proper cards here, but this remains a great little strategy title that works brilliantly. Added modes like an in-depth story add to its appeal, while the ability to buy new cards and edit decks ensure that longevity is guaranteed. A great title that's worth picking up if you enjoy games like Magic: The Gathering.

>> Score **73%**



Mega Man 10

» **SYSTEM:** WIIWARE
» **PRICE:** 1,000 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> More old-school shenanigans from Capcom, albeit hugely improved ones. Ignore the 'Easy Mode' and prepare yourself for another satisfying experience. The eight new bosses are superb, there's a huge number of challenge modes to compete and you've got a choice between Mega Man and Proto Man. Add in a time attack mode and those 8-bit visuals and *Mega Man 10* becomes another essential purchase.

>> Score **88%**



Peggle Nights

» **SYSTEM:** PSN
» **PRICE:** £3.19 » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

>> *Peggle* fans will be in seventh heaven with this substantial upgrade. There's a brand new Peggle Master to beat (a cute electric squid) a ton of new challenges and tables to master and that typical PopCap presentation to admire. Worryingly addictive, this is an absolute steal for its paltry asking price. Just be aware that you already need to own the original *Peggle*, as it's not a standalone product.

>> Score **94%**



Giana Sisters

» **SYSTEM:** IPOD TOUCH/IPHONE
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> Based on the little-known DS update of the infamous 8-bit *Mario*-style platformer, *Giana Sisters* is a respectful, polished, good-looking (bar occasionally rough scrolling), playable old-school game. Cheap deaths are few and the touch-screen controls are fine. Our only issue is that in light of more innovative retro-oriented platforming fare on Apple's platform (such as Soosiz), *Giana* feels unremarkable.

>> Score **70%**

Final Fight: Double Impact

PROPER GAMES DOES A PROPER NUMBER ON FINAL FIGHT

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PS3 » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS » **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM » **DEVELOPER:** PROPER GAMES » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

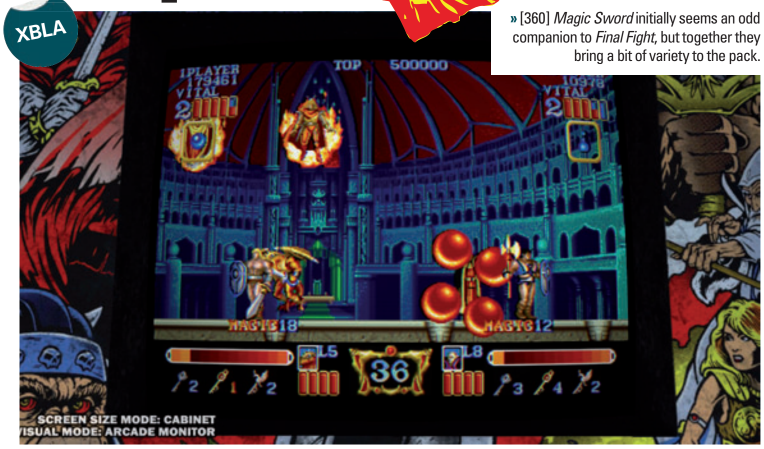


When we booted up *FFDI* and were greeted by one of the best menu screens we'd seen in a long time – a wonderfully detailed render of an original *FF* arcade cabinet plonked inside some grotty slum with a 'have you seen this girl' poster of Jessica Haggar – we knew this was going to be something special, and we weren't wrong.

This is probably the very best version of *Final Fight* you'll find, and just edges the sublime Mega CD conversion (which still ranks as one of the most faithful arcade conversions of all time) for its astonishing presentation and fantastic remixed *Final Fight* score. This game is basically FF+, and should be seen as a fine example of how developers should go about paying homage to their classic games in the future, with subtle optional tweaking here and there.

Of course, *Final Fight* only forms half of this pack with the *Double Impact* bit relating to the inclusion of Capcom's *Magic Sword*, which is a lengthy and enjoyable side-scrolling RPG-themed shooter, which serves as an odd feeling choice of companion for *Final Fight*, but works at offering a nice change of pace to the short and sweet nature of the pack's headliner. Once again, this is also laced with a fantastic remixed soundtrack, making it a must-own for any fan of the game. This is a great double pack that should be downloaded immediately.

XBLA



» [360] *Magic Sword* initially seems an odd companion to *Final Fight*, but together they bring a bit of variety to the pack.

OPINION



While we're gutted this won't be on Game Room, Proper Games has done a staggering job. Presentation is flawless with a great array of options, while the emulation is spot on. *Magic Sword* lets the side down, but this is still great value for money. *Strider* next, please.

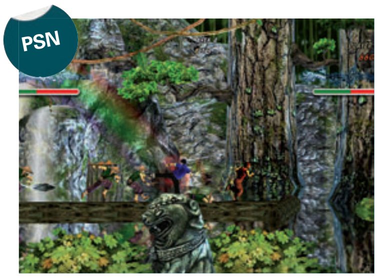


>> Scores

Presentation	93%
Graphics	90%
Sound	96%
Playability	95%
Addictivity	90%

Overall 93%

PSN



Revenge Of The Wounded Dragons

» **SYSTEM:** PSN
» **PRICE:** £6.29 » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

>> The concept of a high-definition scrolling fighter sounds great, but this is a middling effort from Wanako Games that is let down by spongy controls, and a fairly laggy multiplayer game. There's no sense of fun while you're playing, and the constant barrage of identical enemies soon becomes extremely boring. A dull, average beat-'em-up.

>> Score **52%**

Wii Ware



Phoenix Wright: Justice For All

» **SYSTEM:** WIIWARE
» **PRICE:** 1,000 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> Horrendous port of the DS game, which in turn was a remake of a GBA title. While the story itself is as charming as ever, this suffers from being a quick and easy port that just isn't well suited to the Wii controls. When you consider the point-and-click nature of the original gameplay, it's amazing that Capcom has dropped the ball so spectacularly.

>> Score **50%**

PSN



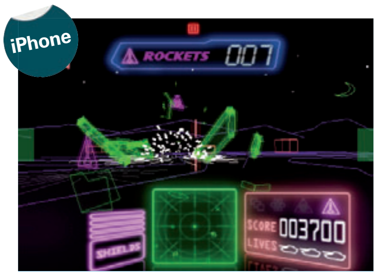
Patchwork Heroes

» **SYSTEM:** PSP (PSN)
» **PRICE:** £6.29 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> Everything about *Patchwork* *Heroes* screams "play me right now". The 2D visuals are absolutely sumptuous with a distinctive Arabic styling that looks wonderfully unique. The gameplay is a maddeningly addictive cross between *Qix* and *Dig Dug II* (the good *Dig Dug*), while the score attack mode and challenging main quest means that there's plenty of replay value. Amazing fun.

>> Score **90%**

iPhone



Vector Tanks Extreme

» **SYSTEM:** IPOD TOUCH/IPHONE
» **PRICE:** £1.19 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> *Vector Tanks Extreme* plays like a lunatic *Battlezone*, with *Duke Nukem* mouthing off in your ear. With controls faithful to the coin-op, glowing vector tanks, positional sound and power-ups aplenty, the game's main mode is an intense, high-octane workout. The 'rage' mode turns things up to 11, with manic 'against the clock' time-attack craziness.

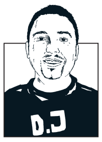
>> Score **85%**

>> AFTER BURNER CLIMAX

XBLA

CLIMAX BY NAME, CLIMAX BY NATURE

After Burner Climax



Now this is the Sega that we know and constantly love: frantic arcade action, classic gameplay, and clear blue skies that stretch on forever. *After Burner Climax* is not only an astonishing blaster in its own right; it also proves that the Sega of old is still alive and well.

A nigh-on perfect port of the 2006 arcade game, *After Burner Climax* immediately assaults your senses thanks to its razor-sharp visuals and astonishingly quick gameplay. Recapturing the magic that worked so well back in the Eighties, *Climax* constantly assaults you with wave upon wave of dangerous enemies. Missiles, gunfire and your own manoeuvrability are your only defence against the hectic on-screen action, and each game leaves you flushed and shaken, but desperate for more.

It takes less than ten minutes to fly across *Climax*'s gorgeously detailed levels, but it's ten of the most exhilarating gaming minutes you'll ever experience. Missiles fly at you thick and fast, orders are constantly barked at you – by members of Ghost Squad, no less – while remixed tunes – you can also listen to the original *After Burner II* soundtrack – blare out of your speakers. It's a joyful assault on the senses that's finished off with some very nifty play mechanics.

It's still possible to barrel roll out of trouble, but the new 'Climax' mode changes things significantly. Once it's built up, your reticule grows larger and everything dramatically slows down. Anything you can mark gets destroyed, greatly boosting any combo multiplier that you have. It's a great new mechanic that actually enhances the original gameplay, as a fair amount of strategy needs to be used in order to get the most out of it. Add in the fact that continually shooting planes will keep boosting your score multiplier and *Climax* becomes an excellent blaster with plenty of replay value.

Longevity is further assured thanks to an excellent score attack mode and the ability to constantly unlock a range of options, ranging from additional credits to larger reticules that modify and enhance the gameplay of the core arcade experience. Add in alternate routes and secret levels and *After Burner Climax* becomes one of the best arcade games we've played on Live Arcade for some time.

In a nutshell

Fast, furious and constantly overwhelming you with a sheer wave of awesomeness, *After Burner Climax* is a title that's instantly accessible yet hard to truly master. You'll have great fun while you're trying, though.

>> Scores

Presentation	80%
Graphics	94%
Sound	84%
Playability	95%
Addictivity	94%
Overall	**93%**

OPINION



If you're a fan of the arcade game you won't be disappointed by Sega's conversion, which is practically perfect. The awe-inspiring visuals look astonishing and the speed and ferocity of the gameplay is simply smile-inducing. Whatever happened to this Sega?

Stuart Hunt

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PSN
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** 800 POINTS
- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **DEVELOPER:** SEGA-AM2
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

» The original *After Burner* was released in 1987 and used the same sprite-scaling technology as *Space Harrier* and *OutRun*. Created by Yu Suzuki, it would be a further 19 years before it received a proper arcade sequel in the form of *After Burner Climax*.

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
SPACE HARRIER (ARCADE)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
ACE COMBAT 6: FIRES OF LIBERATION (360)





» [XBLA] Going into Climax mode slows everything down and gives you a few precious seconds to net additional kills.



» [XBLA] *After Burner Climax* looks absolutely sensational. Download this and prepare to be seriously amazed at its visual beauty.

GO DEEPER

The facts behind After Burner Climax

>> **The original *After Burner* was ported to a variety of home consoles and computers, ranging from the ZX Spectrum to Sega's 32X**

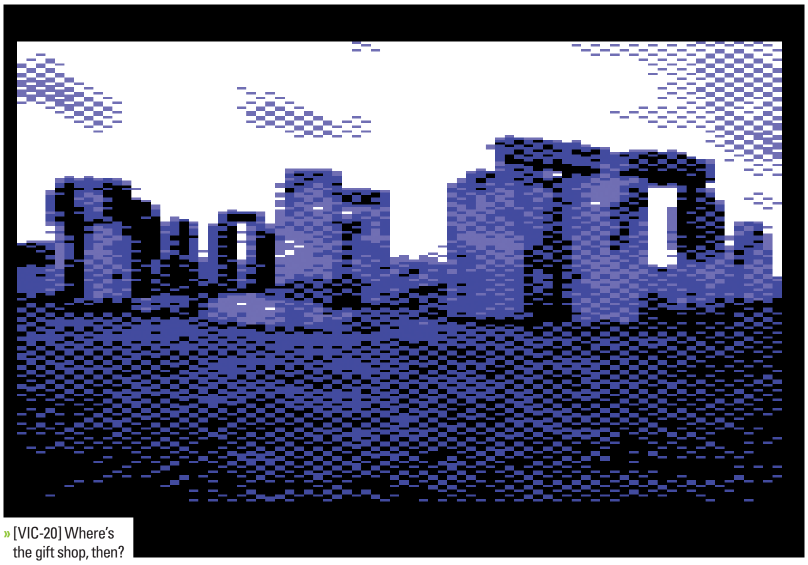
>> ***After Burner: Black Falcon* was released on the PSP in 2007. Although it features many elements from the original game, it is far more mission-based**



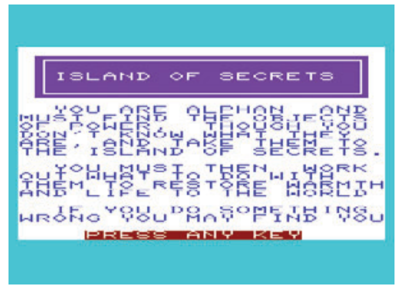


Well, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls… We've got bombs, boxes – a hundred of them, in fact – some space-based blasting, bikes with bizarre add-ons, a game that was originally published in book form and a bilaterally symmetrical invertebrate – I was getting a tad desperate by that point – so Retro Gamer's homebrew this issue was brought to you by the letter B. We don't just entertain; this is educational with it!

ISLAND OF SECRETS



» [VIC-20] Where's the gift shop, then?



» [VIC-20] Your quest begins.



» [VIC-20] Fried mushrooms for tea!



FORMAT: 24K EXPANDED VIC-20
DEVELOPED BY: FORMATER AND ORION70
LINK: TINYURL.COM/YCDAEZJ
RELEASE DATE: 2010
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

A FUN DAY OUT FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY?

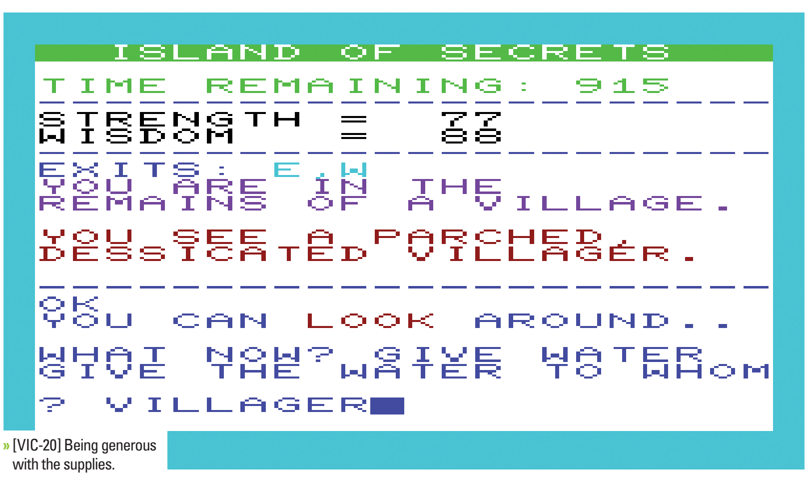
There are some places in the world that sound like visiting them would be a pretty bad idea, and the Island of Secrets is one of those places. Perhaps not quite as ominous as Satan's Kingdom, Death Valley, Slaughter or the Devil's End – okay, so the last one is from *Doctor Who*, but it wouldn't be a popular holiday destination with a creature commonly mistaken for the Devil living under the local church – but the local tourist board must still struggle quite a bit.

Island Of Secrets is converted to the expanded VIC-20 from the Commodore 64. It was published back in 1984 by Usborne Publishing in book form, titled *A Computer Adventure Game: Island Of Secrets*, and yes, that means the original game is, horror of horrors, a type-in listing. But rather than merely transferring the original BASIC program over to the VIC and persuading it to work, this new version has been enhanced to improve how the game describes locations, offer the option of showing objects that the original kept hidden and, through the newly installed 'look' command, load and view pictures from the disk for many key scenes.

The player is charged with discovering the island's secret, wondering to themselves if the local council will change the name if it's uncovered, but initially they're faced with the challenge of collecting a series of objects before arranging to get themselves over to the island itself. Despite its type-in heritage, the original had an entire book dedicated to it and is therefore a sizeable game and, since the original author Scott Shumway added elements such as the strength level that is maintained by eating and drinking, it isn't a traditional text adventure in some respects. There are a couple of random elements, the most annoying probably being the disgruntled group of lumberjacks who apparently don't like strangers around these here parts so clobber them over the head before dragging them off to their cabin and locking them in.

The in-game pictures have been converted to the VIC's low-resolution multicolour mode, which gives a mere 88 pixels across the screen and is therefore rather chunky, especially with only four colours in use for each image. Considering the hardware restrictions, the images are impressive, but viewers will probably need to sit back a few feet further than they normally would and perhaps squint a little to work out what they've been shown. Since they're time-consuming to load and the parser is already somewhat sluggish, it was a wise decision on the developers' part to make viewing pictures optional.

Island Of Secrets is probably best described as an okay game, certainly reasonable at what it does and a notable improvement over the original but unlikely to set the interactive fiction world alight. The random elements and slow playing speed can gang up over time to make it a frustrating experience, but more hardy adventurers should enjoy themselves as long as they take the time to save their position regularly and make a map.



» [VIC-20] Being generous with the supplies.

76%

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

WORM! REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

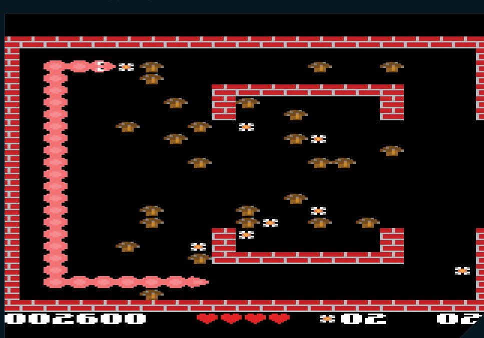
» **FORMAT:** ATARI 7800 » **DEVELOPER:** MARK BALL
» **DOWNLOAD:** TINYURL.COM/YZXQSHD
» **PRICE:** FREE (CARTRIDGE RELEASE SOON)

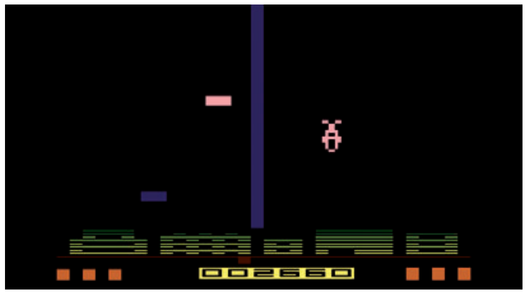
Mark Ball's latest Atari 7800 game *Worm!* is a new take on the *Snake* concept, so players should expect to find themselves guiding Brian the titular multi-segmented organism around various horizontally scrolling play areas, leading him to delicious flowers and apples as he goes, all the while navigating around nasty mushrooms, brick walls and, indeed, his own tail, the latter of which expectedly grows longer as he consumes the various tasty treats.

Yes, we have seen several homebrew variations on this theme over the years and reviewed quite a few, but this does stand out both for being an Atari 7800 title and because it has been assembled rather nicely. Options like the speed of play or Brian's initial length can be tweaked from a menu, and the graphics themselves are simple but attractive and colourful. The in-game sound is sparse but serviceable, limited to spot effects for eating or colliding with things, while the title music is appropriately jolly for a game about a googly eyed worm.

79%

» [Atari 7800] Wriggle it, just a little bit.





» [Atari 2600] Fissile material from above.

BOMBS AWAY REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** ATARI 2600 » **DEVELOPER:** ATARIUS MAXIMUS
» **DOWNLOAD:** TINYURL.COM/YKS9AEL » **PRICE:** FREE

***Bombs Away* is** minimalist gaming even by Atari 2600 standards: a city at the base of the screen is under attack, the defence shields are being overwhelmed by the onslaught, and only the player, stationed on a ground-based, high-powered laser cannon, can save the day by zapping ICBMs out of the sky.

There isn't a sprite trundling in front of the city to represent the player, but if the fire button is held down the laser itself can be used to work out where you are on screen; after that, the game is just a case of getting the beam to where the bombs are quickly and pretty much hoping for the best.

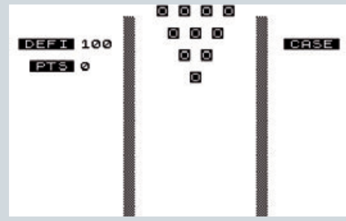
There are options to give the city some shielding, three difficulty settings and 12 levels, but apart from the speed and colours there's nothing to distinguish them. Fun in small bursts, but just not enough variety.

42%



WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [ZX81] Aiming for a strike.

>> Chilling

ZX81 maven Andre Baune has been working away at more games, the latest addition to his already large stable being *Bowl-AB* – or possibly *AB-Bowl*, as we don't think he's settled on a final title just yet – which is a simulation of the ancient art of… uh… ten-pin bowling. Although it hasn't been updated at the time of writing, Andre's website at **www.zx-team.de/andre/** should have information by the time this issue reaches your hands.



» [Atari 8-bit] The port of the original game was impressive.

>> Thrilling

We looked at the conversion of *Hobgoblin* from the BBC Micro to the Atari 8-bit series way back in issue 59 – although it doesn't feel that long ago – and now the same team is working on shifting over the sequel, rather obviously called *Hobgoblin II*. There aren't any screenshots available yet, but it hopefully shouldn't be long before the game is completed and ready for release.



» [Amstrad CPC] Killing stuff against the clock.

>> And Killing

And the award for most appropriate title of the month goes to *Dead On Time*, which was precisely that since it arrived the day the news was being written up. Developed by Paul Kooistra of *Star Sabre* fame and published by Psytronik, it's a fast-paced and colourful arena shooter with two modes of play. It's already available to download free over at **starsabre.bigblog.com.au/post.do?id=393692**, and packaged versions are coming soon.

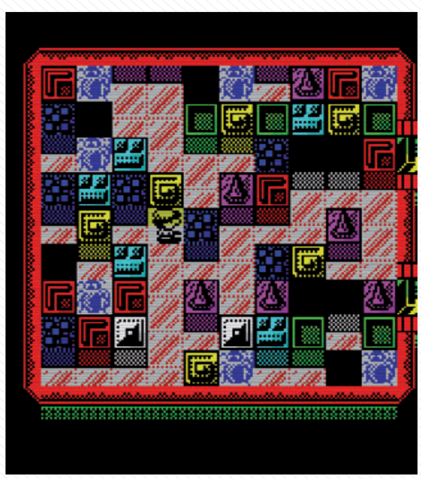
BOX RELOADED REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** SINCLAIR SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** BEYKER SOFT
» **DOWNLOAD:** TINYURL.COM/YZXOBPO » **PRICE:** FREE

Another game about shoving crates around to solve puzzles, and just for a change it isn't a *Sokoban* clone. Instead of pushing boxes to specific points within the room, simply placing them in groups of the same colour will cause them to magically vanish, leaving the route to the collectable objects and exit clear – at least until around halfway through the game, when the level layouts start to get incredibly devious and it becomes all too easy to remove a block at the wrong time. Fortunately, the player is given a couple of retries that will reset the current level so that they can have another go.

The various sets of boxes within the levels are cheerfully, if occasionally confusingly, coloured, and the graphics are very detailed, with all of the sound performed by the Spectrum's beeper. During play there are a couple of spot effects, which could possibly have done with some companions, and a decent tune plays as the title picture is displayed before the game starts proper, but that's it.

87%



» [Spectrum] Warehouse agency work flashback!

HOMEBREW

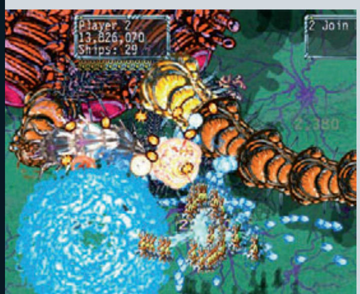
>> The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

>> Full Steam Ahead

It sounds like something the royal family should be endorsing, but *Shoot 1UP* is a vertically scrolling shoot-'em-up with a twist. Instead of using your precious ships one at a time, they all wade into battle simultaneously, with extra lives being immediately added to the formation as they're collected. More information is on the Mommy's Best Games website at **www.mommysbestgames.com/shoot1up.html** and it's available from Xbox Live for 80 Microsoft Points.



» [Xbox 360] I got all my spaceships with me.

>> Crashing Into The Buffers

Hosted by Glorious Trainwrecks, whose Klik of the Month Club encourages participants to make silly games within a 48-hour period, the Klik & Play Pirate Kart 2 (**www.glorioustrainwrecks.com/games/pk2**) was three manic days of ridiculous game development with over a hundred people contributing and a staggering 529 releases churned out over the course of three days. Quite a few are terrible puns and some are clinically strange, but working through and discovering them is good fun. Our award for the coolest name goes to *Sgt Pepper's Lonely R-Type Band*.

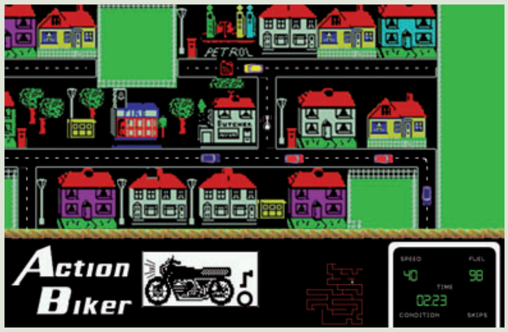
FLASH BOREDOM



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at ***Robot Unicorn Attack.***

NO SERIOUSLY, IT'S called *Robot Unicorn Attack*, plays *Always* by Erasure during play, and uses just two buttons to control the action: Z to make the unicorn jump and X to dash attack. There's a not-safe-for-work advert at the start, but after that it's wonderful campness all the way! **games.adultswim.com/robot-unicorn-attack-twitchy-online-game.html**

REMAKES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING. . .



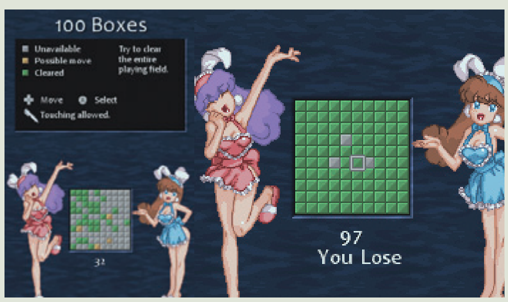
ACTION BIKER



» **DOWNLOAD:** TINYURL.COM/YFNJ3BV

'Clumsy' Colin is having a bad dream; the kind that comes about if you gorge yourself on too many prawn cocktail-flavoured corn snacks. In this dream, a friend has asked for a lift from his house to the local aerodrome but parts of Colin's motorbike are missing and he doesn't even know where he's picking up from. The only solution is to ride around town, checking houses for both parts and his friend before making a dash for the plane.

The graphics are somewhat rough since they've mostly been taken from the Spectrum and blurrily scaled up, but as remakes go this is good fun to play. Random placing of objects within houses is something of a pain, but it does at least prevent things becoming stale.



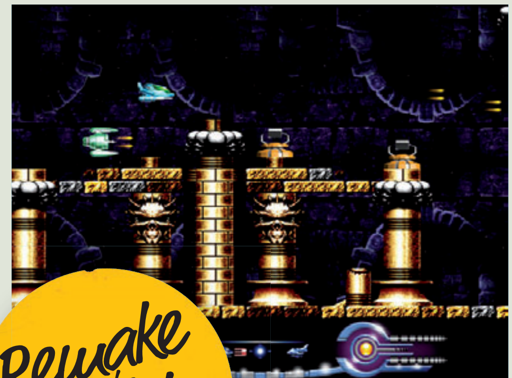
100 BOXES



» **DOWNLOAD:** TINYURL.COM/YKXLM34

The titular hundred boxes are arranged in a grid and the simple but baffling challenge is to change them all to green. After a starting point has its colour changed, each turn offers up to eight possible moves represented by yellow boxes arranged around the last one that was cleared; clicking on one of those will change it to green as well and another set of options are highlighted around that new point.

Options aren't displayed if they're out of the play area or already green, and the real challenge is to avoid painting into a corner with no available moves. Bizarrely, despite only the one game mode with no difficulty settings or even hints, this somehow manages to be simultaneously mind-wrenchingly annoying and totally engrossing.



Remake of the Month



ARMALYTE



» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.PSYTRONIK.COM

When it comes to scrolling shoot-'em-ups, the Commodore 64 is blessed with a magnificent range of titles, but a few have always stood out as exceptional and *Armalyte*, released in 1988 by publisher Thalamus, is one of those games. Developed by Cyberdyne Systems, *Armalyte* stood out in particular due to its stunning graphics and the variety of complex, swirling attack patterns being followed by what was a significant number of enemies, even by 8-bit console standards.

This new version of *Armalyte* is absolutely spot-on as a remake; the developers have taken the original game, all but replicated what made it worth remaking in the first place, and then beefed up the sound and graphics to take advantage of current PC hardware. There are a few differences here and there, of course, and the difficulty level appears to be higher this time around – presumably because the enemies are a little less shy about firing and the bosses have been issued with shiny new laser guns – but that has been balanced out by the addition of a checkpoint system, allowing players to revert to the start of any level reached with their score and lives intact.

To summarise, an excellent 8-bit game has been officially licensed and given an overhaul but hasn't lost anything that made it great. There are a couple of larger publishers that could take a few notes.



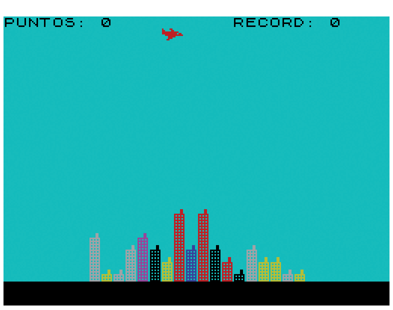
HOMEBREW HEROES

JAIME TEJEDOR GOMEZ (AKA METALBRAIN) HAS QUITE A HISTORY. ALONG WITH I NEED SPEED AND IT'S RAINING BOMBS, HE'S PITCHED IN ON VARIOUS GAMES INCLUDING THE SPECTRUM CONVERSION OF KING'S VALLEY, WHICH WE LOOKED AT A COUPLE OF ISSUES BACK



» [Spectrum] Who'd be a warehouse worker?





HIGH FIVE

The homebrew games that Jaime couldn't live without

1. **La Corona Encantada (MSX, Spectrum)** Very professionally done. Reminds me of good old Dinamic productions.
2. **Majikazo (MSX)** Very polished and precious game. It reminds me of an arcade game.
3. **BeTiled! (Spectrum, MSX, Amstrad)** Pure addiction. I've bought all four released physical versions.
4. **Albatrossity (Spectrum)** Not too spectacular, but it's a great original idea.
5. **Stray Cat (MSX)** A *Canabalt* clone without the random levels. It has a very nice difficulty curve.

Q&A

Retro Gamer: So, what was it that first drew you into programming games for 8-bits?
Jaime Tejedor Gomez: It's been my childhood dream since I got my very first Spectrum. People like Mike Lamb or Don Priestley were my idols. In 1991 I found a schoolmate who had a friend that taught me assembler, but it was already too late… until the internet and emulators put the dream back in my head.

RG: Where do you think the homebrew community's popularity comes from?
JTG: We're all in this due to nostalgia. I think it's the main motivator for all of us in the retro community, but the nostalgia isn't only related to those games we used to love as children, but also everything related to those years, including the excitement of trying new games for our machine. That's where the homebrew coders and artists do our part.

RG: Of the games released so far that you've contributed to, which are you most proud of and why?
JTG: Obviously, *I Need Speed* is the game I've put a major effort into, even porting it to another platform (MSX), and I've been lucky to have a great group of collaborators helping me with the graphics and music. I'm also quite proud of some of the stages that I designed for *Box Reloaded*, and my graphics editor SevenuP. The fact that coders like Jonathan Smith, Jonathan Cauldwell and several others are using it for their games gives me that warm, fuzzy feeling.

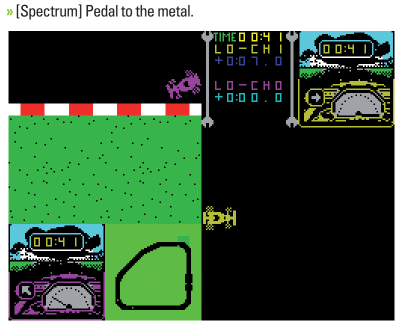
RG: Some of the games you've been involved with are ports and others original. Which do you prefer doing?
JTG: I like both. Original stuff is, of course, more satisfying, but it also takes more time to develop, because you not only have to code; designing the stages and gameplay can be quite costly and it's hard to calibrate the difficulty level.

RG: What are you currently working on?
JTG: I'm coding a new game that was first announced in 2004, called *Frogger Mix*. There used to be a website about it, but that was before I joined CEZ Games Studio and later Retroworks. When that website was published, the idea was doing an open game where anyone could participate if they wanted. In the end, only one person offered his help, and ended up doing nothing. Since then, we think it's better not to say anything until the release is ready or almost ready. Doing this avoids vapourware.

RG: And is there anything you want to make but haven't got around to yet?
JTG: Lots! I developed an ASM library called CezBlocks when I was in CEZGS, and *I Need Speed* was first conceived as a simple game to play with a reduced 48k version of that library, so I'd like to make a proper big game using it. I also have many more ideas in my head, and games I'd like to port – one from the PC to ZX/MSX, another one from the ZX to MSX… – but unfortunately free time isn't infinite, and when I have it, I'm not always in the mood for coding, so I don't know how many of those ideas I'll be able to develop.

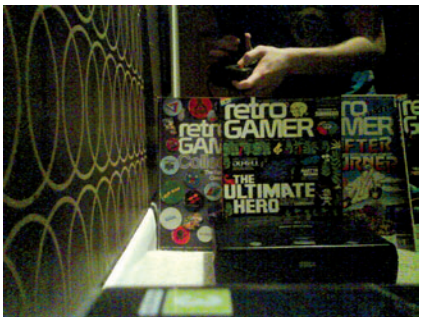
RG: And finally, what advice would you give to anybody wanting to write their own games for classic machines like the Spectrum?
JTG: Firstly, don't think too high for your first project. Start with something smaller that can be done faster, or you'll abandon midway. Secondly, have fun, because if you don't have fun while coding, it will kill your motivation, but be prepared for some dull parts. You must persevere. And lastly, once you're doing a bigger project, get some beta testers and trust their opinion.

» [Spectrum] Pedal to the metal.



MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**



» If you have a skirting board fetish, enjoy.

THIS OLD CHESTNUT AGAIN

Hi **RG**,

First of all, I'd just like to say that I love the mag. You are fulfilling a vital historical record of videogaming before it is largely lost forever.

My question is, though: what do you class as retro? Personally, I think that any generation of machines not made any more – i.e. the Xbox, PS2 and GameCube – is retro.

The Dreamcast is of the same generation as the PS2 and receives coverage in the magazine. I realise that the Xbox 360 plays about half of all the original Xbox releases, and the Wii plays all GameCube games, but those machines are still retro in my opinion.

Your sincerely,

M Sumpter



» [C64] C-3PO was a keen biker before he broke into acting.

While we agree that there are some fantastic games on the Xbox, PS2 and GC, our official line on what qualifies as retro in the magazine is really quite simple: any console released before the millennium. This includes the Dreamcast, as it was released in 1999, but not the PS2, as it just misses the boat, being released in 2000. For obvious reasons, our review section is the only section this thinking doesn't apply to, although games that we review have to be linked, even tenuously, to a series that has retro roots.

DOWN WITH THE KIDS

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

I love your magazine; I buy it every month and retro gaming is my biggest hobby. I'm a collector, and I love to play classic games, whether on the Sega Saturn, Commodore 64, Atari 7800, or even obscure systems like the Memorex VIS, but I know a lot of classic gamers are generally a few years older than me. I got into classic gaming last year; I was 13 at the time, and now I'm 14, and I really couldn't care less for new generation games. I love to play the Atari 2600 and Mega Drive – you name it, I like it – and yeah, my friends don't share my passion, but classic gaming is my virtue.

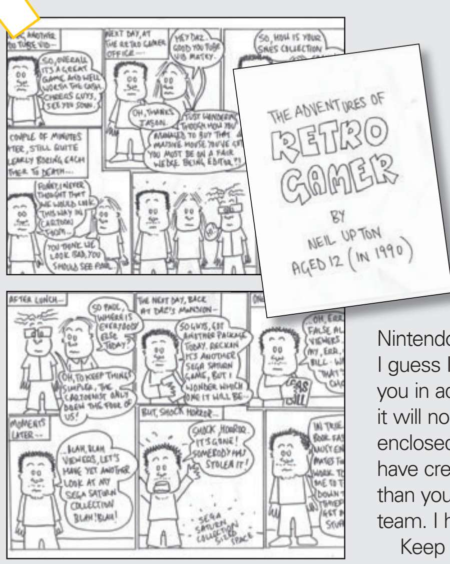
Thanks a lot for giving me something brilliant to read about on my favourite hobby; the magazine is amazing. Enclosed is a picture of me with my Atari 2600 joystick, with my **RG** magazines in shot. Hope you like it.

Thanks,

James, Leeds.

STAR LETTER

A COMICAL LETTER



» Does Darran find his missing Saturn? How cheap is that gas bill? All will be revealed next month!

Dear Darran,

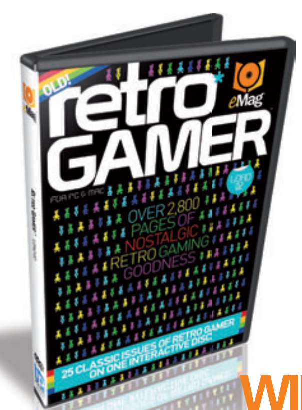
I am a fan of both the magazine and your very own YouTube channel. Thanks to both, I have now made it my mission to buy almost any and every boxed Super Nintendo game from the Nineties. I guess I owe you a personal thank you in advance for the small fortune it will no doubt cost me. Please find enclosed a short comic strip that I have created, starring none other than you and the **Retro Gamer** team. I hope you find it amusing.

Keep up the good work,

Regards,

Neil Upton

Hi, Neil. Thanks for your letter. Darran's glad to hear that his videos are inspiring others to start their own collections. Just to give you an idea of the expense that you might expect, Darran has spent a little over £600 getting his PAL Dreamcast collection together – this includes rare games such as *Evolution 2*, *Samba*, *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* and *Rez* – and he's still 30 games shy of a complete set. Good luck with your collection, though, and drop us a line when you have accumulated a good number and we can see about featuring you inside Collector's Corner.



WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 2**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…



CONTACT US

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Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Next Month: Neil Thompson



>> BURNING QUESTION?

IF YOU HAVE a burning question, such as 'Will David Braben ever patch things up with Ian Bell?' or 'does Matthew Smith check in to hotels as Miner Willy?' then you should head straight over to our forum to post your questions to our interviewees. The best of the bunch will be answered and revealed in the next issue. To find out who we'll be interviewing in the coming months, visit the Retro Gamer forum now at www.retrogamer.net/forum

Hi, James. We've been trying especially hard this past year to help give Retro Gamer wider appeal, so it always puts a smile on our faces when we hear positive feedback from our younger readers. Thanks for the picture, though if you were ever considering a career in photography, forget it. We have received many bad pictures in our time, but none with such a big emphasis on wallpaper and the skirting board!

A MINOR DECIPHER-RELATED ISSUE

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I got the magazine yesterday and would just like to point out that there was a spelling mistake in the title on page 50 that confused and hurt my brain so much. I thought it was a cryptic message that required deciphering and I have been unable to work now for two weeks. My employer won't pay me just because my head hurts due to a decipher-related issue and therefore I am asking that you send me $885.30 in compensation. A further $135.20 is also required for pain and suffering and various assortments of snacks I self-prescribed to soothe that pain.

Thank you kindly.

I will take some tablets now,

Rob

Yes, apologies to Rob and anyone else affected by the missing 'n' in the title of the Unconverted feature in issue 74. We hope no one else went to the ridiculous lengths of Rob just to understand the title of an article that was introduced and spelt correctly in the issue prior, and was correctly spelt on the article's second page anyway. Sadly, we won't be succumbing to your unreasonable demands, Rob. We're not made of money, man!

THE UNDERAPPRECIATED

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

Is there any chance of a feature, or features, on the following software houses: Red Rat, English Software Company or Tynesoft?

As an Atari 8-bit owner before moving over to the C64, I used to spend hours playing *Phantoms*, *Screaming Wings* and *Elektraglide* and am yet to see the games from these three software houses get as much, if any, coverage in the magazine, especially on the Atari formats.

Yours,

Ross Sillifant (aka The Vulture)

You'll be pleased to discover that Tynesoft Software was the subject of our From The Archive feature last issue. As you can see, we're certainly not against covering the tales behind lesser-known software houses and so would happily run features on both Red Rat and English Software Company. It just depends on whether we can track down some of the people that worked there. We'll get our team of freelancers on it and see what we can muster up.

RETRO GAMER CHALLENGE

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I'd like to pose a challenge to your readers. Since my parents bought me my first LCD handheld (*Exterminator*, aka the Game & Watch game *Vermin*) and my brothers were

> "If Billy Mitchell thinks Donkey Kong is 'brutal', he should try this"

RETROBATE PROFILE



Name:	Mike Rawes
Joined:	12 March 2010
Location:	Edinburgh
Occupation:	Computer Programmer
Website:	Not given
Fave Games System:	Not given



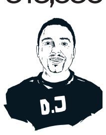
>> [360] Welcome to Game Room, also known as the bridge of the Starship Enterprise.

* BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles



High Score: 313,630

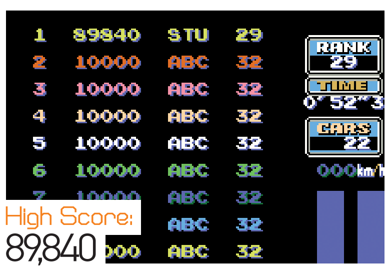


DARRAN

CHOSEN GAME: CRYSTAL CASTLES

Why I picked it: It's one of my favourite games on Game Room so far, and I've found myself completely addicted to it again.

Handy advice: Watch the videos of the top players on Game Room. Why not learn from the masters?



High Score: 89,840

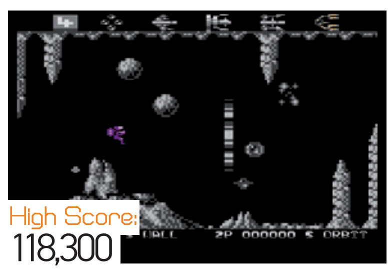


STUART

CHOSEN GAME: ROAD FIGHTER

Why I picked it: I was reminded of just how bloody addictive this game is courtesy of Game Room.

Handy advice: Listen out to the audio cues to rack up some really high scores.



High Score: 118,300



CRAIG

CHOSEN GAME: ZYBEX

Why I picked it: Because I've been looking at how it works as 'research' for an Atari 8-bit game!

Handy advice: Use the Orbital weapon and, if about to die, change weapons to keep it charged.

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What arcade game do you want in Game Room?

thevulture *Planet Harrier* (Sega). Why? Because ever since I first clapped eyes on it in a Dreamcast magazine, I've been eagerly awaiting a home conversion, Yet Sega seems to think that I want ever-worsening *Sonic* games instead, so, ever the optimist, fingers crossed, it appears on here. Oh, and it would make a great change from seeing the same old classics rolled out, in yet another format.

Smurph I would like to nominate every Cave shmup ever, because I can't afford a Japanese 360 to play all the sexy conversions. If it's just one pick, *Progear*, because it would be awesome to play two-player on this, and I do love the horizontal scrollers, which there are not so many of.

thl *Alien vs Predator* by Capcom. It's such a tremendous scrolling beat-'em-up that had very solid gameplay. Unfortunately, it never got any home port at all, not even on the 16-bit or 32-bit consoles.

SpiffierRabbit *Sega Rally*. Need I say any more?

HalcyonDaze00 *Double Dragon*. You cannot have an arcade without it!

Jet Pilot I'd like to see the original *Mortal Kombat*. Its digitised visuals are pretty dated by today's standards, but it brings back a lot of nostalgia for me. The SNES and Genesis versions just don't do the arcade original any justice.

sirclive1 I'd love to see *Hyper Sports* on there, just because it's fun and great for multiplayer.

TwoHeadedBoy *Savage Quest* would be a very messy dream come true for me. I've only ever seen it twice – once on opposite sides of the Atlantic – but each time I've spent upwards of £20 on it.

Igorthegreen *Gauntlet*! Nothing more fun than running around as a dwarf, eating loads of… erm… 'stuff' and killing ghosts!

Jay What Smurph said. Also *Bomb Jack*. And *Flicky*. And *Mr Do's Castle*. And *Juno First*. And *Black Tiger*. And *Ninja Spirit*. And *Bank Panic*. And *Puyo Puyo*.

NonShinyGoose *Mortal Kombat 3*, because they've taken the Live Arcade version off the Xbox Live Marketplace and now I really wish that I had downloaded it!

Miketendo *Cadillacs And Dinosaurs* would be a dream come true if we're talking about beat-'em-ups. Otherwise, maybe since they have Intellivison and Atari 2600 games, how about some Commodore 64?

bsg *Star Wars Trilogy Arcade* (1998). It was one of the games that could have given the Dreamcast a major push but for some unknown reason, they never released it on any home system as far as I know…

dwitefry *Golden Axe: The Revenge Of Death Adder* should be available for everyone to play in their Game Room, Front Room or Bath Room.

Jeremiah Jones *Dragon's Lair* because it's just plain hard to find an actual working arcade cabinet of the game. They're quite prone to breaking down.

dirte lawndre Would have to say *Snow Bros* and *Super Pang*. These games are awesome, and we should have some new players trying these classics.

Mr Vengeance I'd love to see *Sega Racing Classic* (*Daytona USA HD*) in the Game Room if possible. I'd take it on anything really. I just want a home port with *that* handling.

gmintyfresh *Three Wonders* by Capcom. Three beautiful-looking and playable games in one cab: *Chariot* (shmup), *Midnight Wanderers* (platformer), and *Don't Pull* (puzzle). All my tastes covered in one lovely package

Roo *Ridge Racer*. Unlikely, I know, but of all the arcade racers released in the early-to-mid Nineties, the one that has endured is *Ridge Racer*.

nakamura *Midnight Resistance*. Without doubt my fave run-and-gun shooter, with brilliant levels as awesome supercharged balls! Three-way weapon!

JetSetWilly *Dragon Ninja*. Ooh, and *Shadow Warriors*. And, pretty please, *Football Champ*.

learnedrob *Splatterhouse*, simply because there hasn't been an accurate home release. The FM Towns version was close, but not quite 100 per cent accurate.

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

GAME ROOM

sirclive1 This has been the most fun I've had in ages. Only downloaded four games, but I got my personal best on *Centipede* on it and ranked 11th in the world at that time! The medals are a good idea to keep people playing and the games are well priced.

HalcyonDaze00 Love the sound and how it all looks. It's also really cool how you can add all the furniture to your arcade. If they do this properly and live up to the promise of games being released each week then it will be very special.

JetSetWilly A really fantastic idea and, being that I've never played or heard of *Red Baron*, I enjoyed it immensely. I may have found a game to top *Rescue On Fractalus!* as one of my fave games ever! Will definitely be playing more of this and will be adding more games as they appear and as funds allow.

BEST BOSS BATTLES

SirClive Fighting Zeus in *God Of War* was pretty cool, but my favourite ever is the level 3 boss ship in *R-Type*.

ShadowMan *Castlevania: Rondo Of Blood*. The Grim Reaper has always been a favourite boss fight of mine and I really enjoy his battle in *Dracula X*. Plus the boss rush stage right after with the Terror Trio and then Shaft is awesome too! *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*'s Akuma fight. *Sin And Punishment*'s fake planet Earth boss. There's just something really cool about fighting an entire planet as a boss fight!

Mire Mare It's an obvious choice, but I remember the final boss in *Ocarina Of Time* being epic. Throughout the game the bosses were excellent, but I knew that there would be a final battle with Ganondorf and I thought it was going to be incredible. I wasn't disappointed.

GUILTY PLEASURES

Bub&Bob Believe it or not, I often have a quick 15 minutes playing *Peter Shilton's Handball Maradona* on the Commodore 64.

Tepid Snake The guiltiest of all is playing *Altered Beast* with a friend. It's an awful game that's aged horribly, and I damn well know it, but it becomes very amusing when you're suffering through it with a like-minded associate.

David Games with digitised graphics. I love them all: *Pit Fighter*, *NBA Jam*, *Mortal Kombat*. Hell, even *Street Fighter: The Movie*.

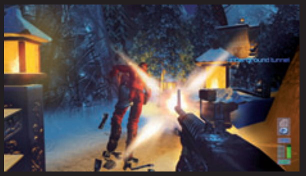
paranoid marvin FMV games. Love 'em all, even the grainy ones with crappy acting – 99 per cent of them.

filtermadg I loved *Rival Turf* on the SNES and used to play it all the time with my brother. It got average to bad reviews in the mags at the time, but it was a great two-player game!

OLD VS NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which Perfect Dark game is the best?

Perfect Dark Zero (Xbox 360)



Perfect Dark (N64/XBLA)



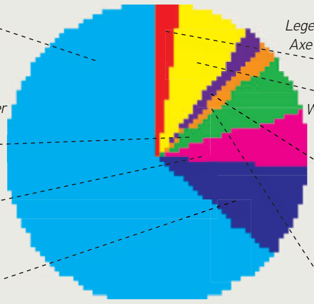
25% | 75%

davekam I hated the original *Perfect Dark*, but I heard this was trash. I choose *GoldenEye*.

SpiffierRabbit Going for *Perfect Dark* XBLA, as the original was awesome and *Zero* wasn't.

HOT TOPIC

Best Golden Axe Game



"*Golden Axe Warrior* is my favourite. A friend and I slogged away on it for hours. As good as *Zelda* if you were a SMS owner" **– chewy**

"*Revenge Of Death Adder* all the way! It has the most diverse cast of characters, and some pretty neat magic. It also lets the player make a few choices about which way to go, and who could fail to love those graphics?" **– flying_delorean81**

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bought an Atari VCS, I've been an avid gamer. I've worked my way through most of the systems over the past 30 years, however I've recently discovered, via the joys of eBay, what I think is the most difficult game ever created. The game in question is *Blockbuster* on the MB Microvision.

I appreciate that it isn't mainstream and I wonder how many of your readers will have played it, but if Billy Mitchell thinks *Donkey Kong* is "brutal", he should try this.

It's basically a *Breakout* clone, but on starting, the ball is hurled towards you at an alarming rate and the chances of returning it feel more like luck than anything to do with judgement. On the odd occasion that it happens to collide with your bat, a rally rarely lasts long and a game with seven lives usually lasts about 30 seconds.

One additional point to mention is that this is with the game on 'easy'. If I change to 'hard', the bat is reduced in length from three to two pixels and the ball speeds up! Suffice to say, I've never cleared the board. So I reiterate my original question: is this the toughest game ever? Think I'll go back to the Game & Watch.

Cheers,

Mike

Unfortunately – or rather fortunately – we've never had the opportunity to play *Blockbuster*, and as Microvisions aren't the easiest things to come by we doubt many of our readers can empathise with your pain. Admittedly, from your very detailed description they should be able to conjure up a pretty vivid picture. We would be interested to hear which games readers feel are the toughest games ever made, though, so write in with your suggestions and reasons and we'll print the best ones in the mag.

SAVE GAME WOE

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

Firstly, I would like to congratulate you on a great magazine. I look forward to reading it every month, especially the news section. I keep hoping that there will be some news about any upcoming retro releases on current consoles. Playing classics in HD is brilliant!

I have a few questions and I hope you can answer them for me. I have had a Sega Saturn for a year or so now. It's a good console, but I'm a bit confused about the battery back-up system that it has. Do you lose all your saves once the battery has died? I'm playing games like *Sega Rally* at the moment but was wondering what would happen if I started playing *Tomb Raider*, save my progress and the battery died? Would I lose all my progress?

Also I've downloaded Game Room for the Xbox. I really like the idea of having my own arcade room and playing some of my favourite arcade games. I was too young to remember classic games from Atari and Intellivision. Even though some of them are quite good, I was wondering if you know if arcade giants such as Sega or Capcom are planning to release any classic arcade games for Game Room.

Kind regards,

Owain Evans, Flintshire

Thanks for your email, Owain. We think you're the first reader to ever write in to say that they especially like our news section, something which very almost got you star letter this month. To answer your question, though, yes, sadly you will lose all of your save game data when the internal battery of your Saturn bites the dust. This actually happened to one of our freelancers recently, who still hasn't fully come to terms with his loss. Regarding Game Room, though, you'll find everything that we currently know about the service in the feature on page 26.

> "Are arcade giants such as Sega or Capcom planning to support Game Room?"

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Game Room

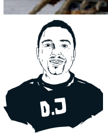
This month we have been discussing nothing but Game Room. Darran is in love with the service, Stuart is loving the fact that he can rewind the action to pretend that he has telekinesis powers, and Steve is now left playing *Battlefield 1943* alone after downloading *Intellivision Football* and vowing never to return to the service. Poor Steve…



» M Sumpter wanted more PS2 in the mag. Wish granted.

CURRENTLY PLAYING





DARRAN

Monster Hunter Freedom Unite

120 hours. That's how much blood, sweat and tears that I've poured into this fantastic game. Needless to say I'm awaiting *Monster Hunter Tri*, as I can't wait to play a proper home version.

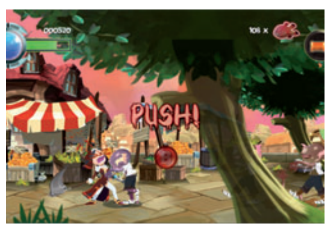




STUART

FIFA 10

We've got a *FIFA* tournament running in the office at the moment, in preparation for the World Cup, so I've been getting in as much practice as possible and trying to hone my skills with my team: Greece.





JASON

Twin Blades

The initial grind in *Twin Blades* is slow, but the action itself is classic horizontally scrolling zombie-slaying that becomes almost hypnotic. Perhaps it's just me, but playing as a nun with a scythe is worryingly enjoyable.

retro GAMER

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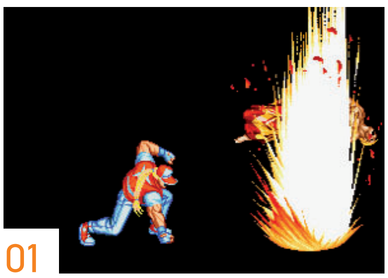
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ENDGAME

REAL BOUT FATAL FURY



» Even though the character appears in Real Bout Fatal Fury 2, the first Real Bout Fatal Fury is famous for being the one where series antagonist Geese Howard snuffs it at the end of the game after falling from a tall building and not walking away from the impact as he did at the end of the original Fatal Fury. Confused? We are. Anyway, here's the 'apparent' moment when this goose gets cooked…



01

» Beaten and bruised, Terry battles against his father's killer, Geese Howard, before finishing the fight with his signature Power Geyser special attack. We feel a sudden pang of déjà vu coming on here. Wasn't this how *Fatal Fury* ended?



02

» With the force generated by Terry's attack, Geese is knocked backwards through a wooden barrier that has proved ineffective in this particular instance. Whose dumb idea was it to fight on top of a tower anyway? Oh yeah, Geese's.



03

» But wait! Being the noble chap that he is, Terry snatches Geese's hand to put a stop to the messy end that was about to occur to his enemy on this warm Wednesday evening. We actually feel a small tear coming on.



04

» Oh dear. What an arrogant idiot you are, Geese. Brushing away Terry's hand like that while smiling back, signalling in no uncertain terms that you'd rather fall to your death than dent your precious pride.



05

» Understandably shocked, Terry can only stand there in reflection and look down at Geese's shrinking form as it plummets down the side of the building and paints a very small part of the town red.